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OR,
The Fugitive Privateer.

A Romance of Ocean Trails.

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AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SKIPPER'S DAUGHTER.

"My child, I have received my death-wound, I fear, so take my place at the helm: but never give up the brig, for yonder craft is a pirate!"

The speaker was a man of fifty, with iron-gray hair, and the air of one born to command.

He stood at the wheel of a small, saucy-looking brig, that was fairly flying over the rough waters, for a storm was raging upon the sea, and carrying canvas enough to run her under, for she would bury her lee-sail at times far out of sight, as she heeled over at a frightful angle, and again would drive her sharp bows into a huge wave, and seem as though she would never rise from the weight of waters upon her decks.

"FATHER, RATHER THAN SURRENDER THE BRIG, I WILL SET HER ON FIRE AND TAKE TO THE LIFE-BOAT WITH ALL ON BOARD," WAS THE REPLY OF THE BEAUTIFUL HELMSWOMAN.

28

Along the weather bulwarks crouched her crew, a dozen gallant tars, clinging for their lives that they might not be washed into the sea, and their eyes were bent alternately upon the clouds of canvas set, and which threatened to tear the sticks out of the brig, and the wheel, where stood their brave skipper, holding his stanch craft upon her way with a hand that never swerved, a heart that never quivered at the peril about them, as in their wake was a peril far worse than death in the cruel sea.

Near the skipper, clinging to the taffrail, and glancing astern at a rakish-looking schooner that was coming swiftly on in pursuit, also spreading an amount of canvas that threatened to run her under, was a young girl of eighteen.

Her face was bronzed by sunshine and wind, and her hair of red-brown hue, was loose, torn from its fastening by the fierce winds, and was floating about her like a huge veil.

Her form was slightly above the medium height of lovely womanhood, but perfection in mold, graceful in every movement, and showed strength and beauty combined.

She was attired in a stylish suit of sailor blue, trimmed with gold-lace across the bust, upon the sleeves and collar, and upon her head wore a jaunty blue cap, also embroidered in gold, and with a tassel hanging on the left side.

Beautiful in face, yet, as in her form, her beauty was alive with strength, for character, fearlessness and resolution were stamped upon every feature.

"Father, it is an English privateer, for she carries British colors," the maiden had said, after closely examining the pursuer through her glass.

Her father made no reply, while he kept his vessel as steadily on her course, as he could in that wild sea and savage wind, and the girl once more turned her glass upon the schooner, which came so swiftly on in chase.

Then, as she looked there came a huge burst of white smoke from the schooner's bows, as she rose on a mighty wave, the deep roar of a heavy gun mingled with the thunder of the heavens, and the daring helmsman was torn from the wheel by the iron messenger and hurled to the deck with one arm shattered to the shoulder.

Then it was that he had uttered the words that open this story, as he lay limp and bleeding upon the deck.

But already had the one he addressed sprung to the helm, some strange impulse causing her to seize the wheel, instead of going to her father's aid, while she called out in a voice that reached the ear of every seaman:

"Ahoy, men! take my father into the cabin, and you, Bronx, come to the wheel!"

"No, no, leave me here! lash me to the weather bulwark, and you, Sibyl, keep the helm, for you know what the Mermaid can do better than any one else on board," cried the old skipper, and the seamen who had rushed to his side, drew him under the shelter of the windward bulwark, and, crouching about him made his position as comfortable as was possible.

"Let me aid you, Sibyl," said a young sailor, stepping to the side of the maiden.

"No, Bronx, but go to my father's side, for the Mermaid steers easily, and I know her every movement, and a strange hand may throw her over or run her under, and you know how precious is our cargo," said the young girl.

"Ay, precious indeed, my child, for, better my death a hundred times over than that we lose this fine cargo more valuable than gold," called out the wounded skipper.

"Go, Bronx, and do all you can to save my poor father," commanded the girl in a low, tremulous voice, as she held the brig on her perilous course.

The young seaman turned away, and, as he did so, again came a shot from the vessel in chase, and the iron ball went tearing along close to the deck, splintering the mainmast as it did so.

But the fair helmswoman never flinched, never looked back at their foe, but kept the brig on her way without the swerve of half a point from her course.

A shot came a shot, and this time it tore along the deck, killing one man and wounding another, while the splinters flew in all directions.

Still those small hands upon the wheel trembled not, nor did the bronzed, beautiful face blanch with fear, as her wounded father's voice was heard:

"Sibyl, do not give up the brig, for remember the cargo we carry, and above all remember that yonder craft in pursuit is a pirate."

"Father, rather than surrender the brig, I will set her on fire and take to the life-boat with all on board," was the reply of the beautiful helmswoman, and a cheer broke from the lips of the half score of brave seamen, while the wounded skipper said fervently:

"God bless you, my noble girl, for now, if die I must, I can die content, and my words to you are, before you allow yourself to fall into the hands of that cruel pirate, drive your stiletto to your heart."

"I will do it, father," was the low response, and the resolute face showed that she meant all that she said.

CHAPTER II.

BIANCA THE BUCCANEER.

THE brig that was flying through the storm, from her pursuer in her wake, showed her stanchness by not running under, or going over in the severe blow.

Standing at her wheel the fair helmswoman faced the double danger, of the tempest and the schooner's fire, with a nerve that was remarkable.

Her skill in handling the vessel was wonderful, and many a time the crew held their breath as the brig made a fearful lurch, expecting never to see her rise again; but Sibyl knew the craft, and her strength was equal to her skill, and she would ease up upon the helm just in the right time, and bring the Mermaid back to a level keel once more.

Pale, with features set as though carved in marble, the young girl would glance each moment toward her wounded father, with the group of seamen about him, while he, brave man that he was, would repress his groans of agony that he might not distract the attention of his noble daughter from the sacred duty imposed upon her of saving the brig.

The schooner coming on so swiftly in the wake of the brig, was a vessel of decidedly wicked appearance, belonging to the style of craft known in those days, a century ago, as "long, low and rakish," and which were the accepted class for both pirates and privateers.

She carried a reef in her foresail and mainsail, and her topsails were not set, but her jib was up, and this canvas drove her through the water at a tremendous speed.

For long hours the chase had been kept up, at first in a light wind, when both vessels seemed equal in speed, and then, as the storm swept down upon them, a summer thunderstorm, the schooner had gained slowly, yet steadily.

The skipper of the brig had hoped to keep out of range until night, and then dodge his enemy.

He knew the wonderful speed of the Mermaid, and as the schooner began to gain on her, he had muttered:

"There is but one craft afloat that can catch the Mermaid, that I have ever heard of, and I will soon know if that is the one."

He had called to the young seaman, Bronx, to take the wheel, for his daughter was then in the cabin, while he turned his glass upon the schooner.

For a long time he watched the schooner and then muttered:

"Yes, that is the craft I feared it was, for I can distinctly see her strange figurehead, as her bows rise, the red hand grasping a flaming torch."

"Yes, it is the pirate craft Sea Torch."

Soon after his daughter had come on deck, but until he was wounded he had not made known his discovery.

"Do not yield an inch, but hold her on her way, Sibyl, for she had better go under than become the prize of the Sea Torch," called out the wounded man.

"The Sea Torch, father?" cried Sibyl, and her words were echoed in a chorus by the crew.

"Yes, my child, that schooner is the Sea Torch, with Bianca the Buccaneer her master, so you know the inhuman bloodhound that is in our wake."

The small hands did but clinch the wheel spokes more closely at this, and the pretty mouth became more firmly set.

Thus the chase continued, the schooner steadily gaining, and firing when she could at the brig.

In a short while the storm had swept over, but the wind still blew fresh, though, getting out of the path of the tempest, the sea was less rough and the brig seemed to hold her own.

Then the schooner shook the reefs out of her main and foresail, and once more began to walk up on the brig.

"Ahoy, lads! set her topsails, for she'll bear them now!" cried Sibyl, and the crew of the brig sprung to work, and with this reserved sail the brig held her own, though at the risk of her spars.

Seeing this the schooner also set her topsails, and a cheer broke from the men on the Mermaid as the fore-topsail was snapped off.

A moment after, as she heeled frightfully, the maintopsail was taken in and the brig merely held her own.

Seeing this the schooner's commander opened a steady fire, and thick and fast the shot fell about the brig, now and then cutting through her sails or striking the deck.

But the brave girl never flinched, and her silent prayer was that night might come on dark and stormy, and thus allow the brig a chance to escape.

But vain the hope; in vain the prayer. As a solid shot came shrieking after the brig, just as the shadows of night began to deepen upon the sea, and with a crashing sound buried itself in the foremast.

The vessel reeled under the terrific shock, and then came the crashing of timbers, snapping of ropes and flapping of canvas, as the mast went

over into the sea, the strain tearing the main-topmast from its hold and carrying it with the wreck.

A cry of dread arose from the crew, but the young girl uttered no word of alarm, but simply let go of the wheel and stepped toward her father as the brig lay to.

"Father, I have done my best," she said, in a voice of perfect calmness.

"Then take to the lifeboat and set the brig on fire!" shouted the old skipper.

"The lifeboat hangs shattered at the davits, and the other boats were swept into the sea, father," was the response.

The old skipper groaned in agony of spirit, and for a moment was silent, while, crouching by his side the young girl laid her hand upon his wounded arm, which Bronx had dressed as best he could.

At last he said:

"You have your stiletto, my child?"

"Yes, father."

"And will use it, if need be?"

"I will, father."

"Enough! then we can only wait the coming of the buccaneer, and Heaven have mercy upon us."

And thus the wrecked brig lay with her waiting crew while the schooner came swiftly on.

The sea tossed her about, while the wreckage was not cut away and hung over her side.

Coming up to leeward the buccaneer schooner lay to, and a boat was soon after launched, and came bounding over the rough waters toward the brig.

"Brig ahoy! What brig is that?" cried a stern voice from the boat.

"The merchant brig Mermaid, Captain Norman Hurst, commander, bound South," called out Sibyl, in quick, seamanlike tones.

It seemed to the young girl that her words caused some excitement on board the boat, for there came the order for the oarsmen to cease rowing.

"Then, after a moment, the order was given to give way, and the boat came in toward the brig."

As she ran under the lee a tall form sprung on deck, cutlass in hand, and advanced to where Sibyl stood near her father, the crew grouped about them.

The one who boarded was a man of fifty, perhaps, with iron-gray beard and hair, both worn long.

He was dressed in the uniform of a British naval captain, which carried out the idea that his vessel was an English cruiser, from the flag flying over her decks.

He looked surprised at sight of Sibyl, raised his cap with a quiet dignity, and said:

"Where is the captain of this brig?"

"I command now, sir, for my father was wounded by your fire," was the reply of Sibyl.

"A fair commander, surely; and now I see that I was right when I thought I saw a woman at the brig's wheel; but where is your father, young lady?"

The men stepped one side, and revealed the wounded man, lying against the bulwark, and supported by cushions brought from the cabin.

"Are you Norman Hurst?" asked the captor, gazing intently at the wounded skipper.

"I am; and somehow your voice and your face are strangely familiar to me," answered the skipper, suppressing a groan of agony.

"They well should be, for I am your brother."

"Great God! you are my youngest brother, Bianca Hurst?" cried the skipper.

Over the face of the captor came a look that was dark, sinister, and revengeful, as he answered, in a voice that was full of sarcasm:

"Yes, I am that curse of English aristocracy, a younger brother, while you, Sir Norman Hurst, were the first-born, and inherited title, estates, and all."

"Ah, Bianca, do you still hold that against me, after all that I did to step aside for you and Rafael?"

"What did you do?" sneered the man, as he gazed down upon his brother.

"I left England forever, and came to America to seek my fortune," was the brave skipper's answer.

"You did not die?"

"No; but I led all to believe me dead, that you might fall heir to the title and estates you so craved."

"There was Rafael yet between me and the prize," said the pirate, scowling vengefully as he spoke.

"I thought that our brother Rafael had been lost at sea."

"Oh no; he turned up again, and so stepped into the place you had vacated for me, curse him!"

"Thank God! Rafael is not dead!"

"Ah, yes, curse you! you are rejoiced to keep me out of my rights, are you?"

"Your rights when both Rafael and I are dead, Bianca. I fear I soon will be, for your shot shattered my arm, as you see," sadly added the wounded skipper.

"Would to God it had killed you, and that Rafael Hurst had been in range of the same shot," was the fierce rejoinder.

"Ah! Bianca, my poor, misguided brother, bitter indeed must be your hatred for those of your own flesh and blood, that you utter such words."

"Bitter indeed is my hatred of all who stand between me and the title and estates of Norman Hurst."

"By being a younger son I lost it, yes, and my soul, too, for know you, Sir Norman Hurst, as I am your own brother, am I Bianca, the Buccaneer!"

CHAPTER III.

A BROTHER'S HATE.

FOR a moment after the fiercely uttered words of the captor of the brig, a silence fell upon all.

The wounded skipper gazed at the man in horror, while Sibyl stood like a statue, her eyes fastened upon the face of the man as though fascinated.

"And you really are my brother, Bianca?" at last murmured the skipper, as if dazed by the announcement.

"Yes, and I repeat I am Bianca, the Buccaneer, and you and your craft are my prize," was the quick reply.

"You confess to your shame and crime, sir, with seeming pleasure," said Sibyl.

He started at her words and turned furiously upon her, as though with intent to strike her to the deck; but she did not flinch, and met his gaze with a look that seemed to abash him for a moment, but only for a moment, for with savage earnestness he demanded:

"Girl, are you that man's daughter?"

"I am proud to say I am."

"And you are, therefore, my niece?"

"With deepest shame I confess that is so, if you are indeed Bianca Hurst."

"Spare your tongue, girl! What I am the accident of birth made me—blighted me—cursed me. Looked down upon, given a poor relation's pittance, a mere nobody among my equals in blood, is it strange that I became embittered with the world, hated my kinsmen, and detested mankind in general? or that I sought to carve out my fortune in my own desperate way? No! Not strange! and that you find me a pirate is the result of my wrongs, others having usurped my rights."

"And a most inhuman pirate, if rumor speaks aright of the cruel commander of the pirate Sea Torch," the brave Sibyl added.

"Yes, I am all that rumor has painted me, perhaps worse, as even you shall see, for I shall now be able to remove one barrier from between me and the inheritance of Norman Hurst, by swinging my eldest brother, Sir Norman up to the yard-arm of his own vessel, wounded though he is, and adopt you as my daughter—a pirate's daughter!"

That the reckless man meant all that he said, his cruel face showed, for it fairly writhed with hatred and passion and triumph.

At his words the skipper turned even more pallid than his wound had caused him to be; but he showed no fear, for it was not of himself that he thought, but of his daughter, she whom he must leave in the hands of a corsair, or who must, to save herself, die by her own hand.

"Bianca has done you but justice, for you certainly are a devil in human form," retorted Sibyl.

The bold words startled the fiend she confronted, while Bronx whispered:

"For God's sake, Sibyl, do not infuriate him to kill you."

"I wish to," was the low reply.

The pirate caught her words, for he said:

"I will not oblige you, my sweet niece. Ah no, for I cannot afford to lose you, just yet."

"Ho, men, come here and run this wounded brother of mine up to the yard-arm!"

His words were addressed to the crew of his boat, who had boarded with him—a dozen in number, and who now stood on the lee of the wrecked brig.

At his words they moved promptly forward; but as they did so, a deep roar broke upon the air, and an iron shot came flying over their heads.

A cry of alarm came from the lips of the corsair captain, and in the gathering gloom he saw a vessel coming rapidly down upon his schooner.

That she was an armed vessel a glance showed had not the shot done so, and that she was a match for his schooner seemed evident from the bold advance of the stranger upon him.

"To your boats, men, and we'll pull for the schooner; but you go with me, my sweet niece, and I'll hang your father after I have whipped off yonder bold cruiser, for this brig is too valuable a prize to lose!"

As he spoke, the Ocean Outlaw sprang toward the maiden, as though to grasp her in his arms and carry her with him.

Springing backward Sibyl drew a small stiletto from her bosom and cried:

"Stand back, you monster, or I will drive this blade into my own heart!"

The pirate shrunk from driving her to the dread act, and turning, ran toward his boat, as another shot came from the stranger, and cries

were heard from the Sea Torch, giving the alarm.

"Another time we shall meet, girl," he shouted, as his boat went speeding toward his schooner.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

A FERVENT utterance of thanks came from Sibyl Hurst, as she saw the pirates' boat speed away, leaving her father upon the schooner, and herself free.

She then sprang to the side of the wounded skipper, to see what she could do to alleviate his intense sufferings, and she was thus engaged when the cheers of the Mermaid's crew told her that the buccaneer was flying before his approaching foe.

It was still light enough to see the two vessels, and she beheld the black flag of the buccaneer defiantly hoisted to the peak of the schooner, where the English colors had been flying.

Then she turned to the vessel that was coming swiftly over the waves toward them.

It was a schooner, and she sailed well.

Her tonnage was hardly more than that of the pirate craft, while she seemed not to carry so large a spread of canvas.

As she came on she opened sharply from her bow guns, and her aim was perfect, for every shot seemed to strike the outlaw craft.

The pirate schooner replied rapidly and viciously from his stern guns, and now and then changed his course somewhat so as to send a savagely meant shot at the crippled brig.

Seeing this, the cruiser luffed and sent a broadside upon the pirate, his commander seeming to feel that he was unable to overhaul the chase, as he had not speed enough.

The broadside cut away the foretopmast of the schooner, and brought the foresail down with a run; but the sail was quickly raised again, and the outlaw craft held on, though the delay had caused her pursuer to creep up on her.

Again luffing the cruiser sent another broadside, and this cut the end of the pirate schooner's bowsprit off; but this damage was also quickly repaired by running out a jury spar, and the Sea Torch still held on.

With all that he could do to keep aboard of the schooner-of-war, and also to stand her fire, the revengeful old pirate had no time to turn his guns upon the brig, and the Mermaid escaped this affliction after the first broadside the cruiser had sent after the flying craft.

Standing upon the brig's decks, Sibyl had seen all, and had reported to her father what was occurring.

"How far off is the cruiser now, my child?" asked the skipper.

"From the brig hardly a quarter of a mile, and from the pirate over a mile, father."

"He is still in chase?"

"Yes, father, and seems to bear off, so as not to bring us in the line of fire."

"Can the cruiser overhaul the pirate, think you?"

"No, sir, for the outlaw craft is too fleet for him, crippled though she is."

"Yes, she must be a phenomenal sailer to catch the Sea Torch, for that craft is the only one the Mermaid has to fear; and, differently rigged, our little beauty would have nothing to fear from any keel afloat," said the wounded skipper, with justifiable pride in his own craft.

As the cruiser seemed to realize the utter uselessness of chasing the schooner, unless crippled more than she then was, she kept up a hot running fire upon her.

Thus she swept by the brig and held on for a mile, when the pirate had increased his lead, and though suffering from the fire of his pursuer, had managed to escape.

So the cruiser put back toward the brig, and running near, hailed:

"Aho! the brig!"

"Aho!" shouted Bronx.

"What brig is that?"

"The Mermaid—an American craft, in the Government service!" responded the young seaman.

"Ay, ay! I will board you," came in reply, and in ten minutes more an officer sprang over the side of the brig and walked aft with Bronx, who met him at the gangway.

He raised his hat politely as he caught sight of Sibyl, and said:

"I had no idea a lady was on board and under the fire of that pirate."

"You know the schooner then, sir?" asked Sibyl.

"Yes, miss, as the Sea Torch, under that arch-fiend Bianca the Buccaneer; but your vessel seems to have been badly crippled, and I fear her skipper has suffered."

"It is my father, sir, Captain Norman Hurst, and his arm was shattered by a shot from the pirate."

"This is bad!" and turning quickly, the officer hailed his vessel.

"Ho, the Scorpion!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the answer.

"Send Surgeon Bennett at once on board this brig, with all that is necessary to care for the wounded."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"You are very kind, sir, and I thank you, for my poor father sadly needs surgical aid," said Sibyl.

"He shall have all the care we can bestow, miss, I assure you; but who is your first mate?"

"I act in that capacity, sir, as my father is wounded," was the low reply.

"Yes, sir, my daughter commands now, and she is as capable as I am, girl though she is," spoke the skipper.

"Then, fair captain, my business is with you, so kindly give me what particulars you care to of your vessel, its last port and destination."

"May I ask what vessel yours is, sir?"

"Ah, yes, and I beg pardon for not before stating."

"I am Manton Moncrief, lieutenant and commander of the United States schooner-of-war Scorpion."

"I thank you, sir, and I am Sibyl Hurst, at present commanding the American brig Mermaid, now a Government store-ship, with arms, ammunition and supplies for our army in the Carolinas, whither we are now bound."

"Then you have indeed a cargo as valuable as gold, for it is sadly needed in the Carolinas, as I know, having just run the gantlet of the British fleet out of Charleston, and have been urgently requested to forward supplies by the commanding officer there."

"By your coming, sir, to drive off yonder buccaneer, you have saved the brig and cargo; but we are in a crippled condition, as you see," said Sibyl.

"True, but we can rig jury-masts, and I will act as your convoy on to Charleston; but I see my surgeon coming, so will have your father removed into the cabin."

This was done, and half the Scorpion's crew were ordered on board the brig and set to work repairing damages, while Captain Hurst, after undergoing the amputation of his arm close to the shoulder, was given every hope by the surgeon that his strong constitution would pull him through the dangerous wound and great shock which he had received.

Leaving Bronx in charge, Sibyl devoted herself to the care of her father, and toward dawn leaned over upon his pillow and slept.

When she awoke the sun was shining brightly upon the sea, and seeing that her father still slept, she hastened upon deck.

To her delight she saw that the brig had been most skillfully rigged with jury-masts, and under a fair press of sail was gliding swiftly along before a ten-knot breeze, holding her own with the schooner-of-war which was a few cable-lengths to leeward.

"Heaven be praised! we have escaped from the power of that man, our kinsman," she said, with deep emotion, and turning, she beheld the surgeon of the Scorpion, who, at the command of Lieutenant Moncrief, had remained on board the Mermaid to devote himself to the care of the wounded skipper.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE SURGEON KNEW.

SEVERAL days after the escape of the Mermaid, from the hands of Bianca the Buccaneer, Surgeon Bennett of the Scorpion, came into the cabin of the brig, as she was sailing swiftly along on her course for Charleston.

The wounded skipper was reclining in his cabin, and near him sat Sibyl, reading to him.

After dressing his wounded arm the surgeon said:

"You are improving rapidly, Captain Hurst, and by the time we reach port, will be out of all danger."

The skipper's face was haggard, and pinched with suffering, but he felt himself that he had fallen into skillful hands, and was steadily improving.

"Be seated, Surgeon Bennett," said Sibyl, when he had finished his work.

The surgeon obeyed, for he was young, handsome, and already very much in love with Sibyl.

"May I ask you, Surgeon Bennett, who is the commander of the Scorpion?" said Captain Hurst, after awhile.

"His name is, as you doubtless know, sir, Manton Moncrief, and he is a lieutenant in the Navy of the States, having been appointed such for his distinguished services as captain of the American privateer."

"Can he be Captain Moncrief, of the Privateer Sea Dragon?" asked Captain Hurst.

"He is none other, sir; but his splendid schooner Sea Dragon was sunk in an engagement with a British brig-of-war and an English privateer, the Scorpion."

"He boarded the Scorpion in his boats, when the Dragon was sinking, and carried her, after which he attacked the brig with the privateer and made her strike her colors."

"He had won fame before, as you know, sir, for you seem to have heard of his career in the Sea Dragon, and for this victory was commissioned a regular lieutenant in the Navy of the United States, and sent out upon the Scorpion cruising, the brig being pretty badly crippled."

"He has a gallant record, and his saving this vessel with its valuable stores, will add to his fame," said Sibyl.

Yes, he is called the Sailor of Destiny, by his men, and his crew idolize him.

"Had the Scorpion been as fleet as was the old Sea Dragon, we would have ended the career of Bianca the Buccaneer, for Lieutenant Moncrief was once the captive of the pirate chief, and has a score to settle with him for his cruelties to him, out of his acts of piracy."

"Ah! he was the captive of Bianca, you say, Surgeon Bennett?" asked Sibyl.

"Yes, Miss Hurst, for Lieutenant Moncrief has risen from before the mast to his present position, and, when cabin-boy on board of a merchant vessel fell into the hands of Bianca, and, for nearly a year was his prisoner."

"He has had quite an adventurous experience?"

"Yes; he began life on a vessel at sea, for he was born on board ship, he says, and nothing more is known of his life than that, for he has little to say of his past, and, in fact, seldom speaks of himself."

"He is quite youthful looking," said the skipper.

"Twenty-five, I believe, but with the experience of a man twice his years, and a nerve of iron, a courage that reaches desperation at times, for he takes fearful chances to win, and as a sailor I have never seen his equal, and I was surgeon of the Sea Dragon when he was third officer on board, and saw him, in two years, go up to commander," and the surgeon devoted himself to his captain, ran on about his good qualities for a long time, little dreaming how deep an interest he was awakening for him in the very heart that he was so anxious to win, for Sibyl had been deeply impressed with Manton himself since the moment her eyes had met his as he boarded the crippled brig.

The next day the two vessels were becalmed, and lay a mile apart, rolling upon the swell and flapping their sails idly, as they were spread to catch the first breath of a breeze.

"I will go on board the Surprise, Captain Hurst, and see if I may be needed, for this calm will doubtless last for hours," said Surgeon Bennett, and Bronx ordered a boat to be lowered, and it pulled away for the schooner-of-war.

"Well, Bennett, how is your patient?" asked Lieutenant Moncrief, as he sat in his cabin, idly puffing at a cigar.

He was a man of fine physique, with an air of grace in every motion, and the appearance of strength, endurance, and activity of one who knew his power and kept up his athletic training.

He was attired in a neatly-fitting fatigue uniform, wore it well, as though long accustomed to it, and his feet, that rested upon a chair in a lazy way, and his hands, one of which held his cigar as he spoke to the surgeon, were small and shapely.

His head was small and well poised above his broad, square shoulders, and his face was a study in its power, intelligence, and manly beauty.

Looking older than the years with which Surgeon Bennett had accredited him, he yet had a look of boyish pleasure resting upon his face, mingling well with the stern manliness his position demanded.

His hair, a dark brown, was rather long, and clustered in waving masses about his neck, while a long, silken mustache, then uncommon in America and England, gave him a foreign look.

In answer to his question Surgeon Bennett said:

"I came aboard, sir, to report him rapidly improving, and in a fair way to recover."

"I am glad, indeed, to hear this, for his own and his sweet daughter's sake; but I hardly believed he could rally."

"His will is great, sir, and he was determined not to die, while he has an iron constitution to uphold him and has had the best of care."

"I do not doubt that, Surgeon Bennett, for otherwise he would never have pulled through with such a wound."

"No, sir, the bone was shattered from below the shoulder to the hand, and the shock was fearful to him; but he is a man of pluck."

"And his daughter inherits it?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Moncrief, to a wonderful extent."

"Why, sir, she can command that vessel as well as her father, and fear seems to be a word unknown to her."

"Who are they, Bennett?"

"From what I could learn, sir, from the young mate, Bronx, and what they have said, Captain Hurst is a retired sailor, and a rich one."

"He has a farm on the Long Island shore, near Jamaica Bay, I believe, and dwelt there with his daughter, his only child."

"And has taken to the sea again, it seems?"

"Yes, sir; but he built the brig, after a model of his own, and was going to present her to the Government as a cruiser, so Mate Bronx said, when he was asked to run a cargo of stores and ammunition in her to the Carolinas, and he left New York for that purpose when he was overhauled by the Sea Torch."

"Well, the brig sails like the wind, and, but for being crippled by the pirate, would have escaped him, I am sure; but it was strange that

from neither vessel we were seen until I opened fire.

"Still, Bennett, if the brig was mine, as I have watched her the past few days, I would rig her as a schooner, and so rigged, my word for it, she would outsail any craft afloat."

"I agree with you, sir, and he might sell her to you if you asked him."

"Well, I have just twenty-five thousand dollars laid up from my prize-money, and all I have put away, and I'll give it to him for the brig, so ask him if he will sell her."

"Better go back with me, sir, and ask him, for this calm will last till sunset," and Surgeon Bennett put another stumbling-block in the way of his winning Sibyl's heart, by this invitation to his handsome commander, who promptly accepted it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SKIPPER'S STORY.

WHEN Surgeon Bennett had departed for the schooner, Sibyl asked her father if she should read to him, as was her wont often to do.

"No, Sibyl, talk to me, or rather let me talk to you," he replied in a thoughtful manner.

"The surgeon said that you were to keep quiet, father, and not to talk much."

"True, but I will feel better after what I have to say to you is off my mind."

"You are sure it will not hurt you, father?"

"I am certain, for I wish to tell you a secret."

"Indeed, father?"

"Yes, for I have never told you much of who I was, never told you more of our family than I had to, as I was in hiding, as it were."

"But now, since my meeting with my poor, sinful brother, I feel that you should know all."

"I am an Englishman, as you know, my child, and well born, for I bear a title."

"My parents both died ere I was twenty-three, and our family consisted of my father, mother, my two brothers and myself."

"I was the oldest and therefore the heir to the title and estates, while my brothers, as younger ones, got but a small income."

"Unfortunately my parents made both Rafael and Bianca feel their inferiority to me, as did the servants, though, I am happy to say that I did not, and have nothing to censure myself for in that respect."

"Bianca entered the navy, and Rafael became an army officer, while I remained at home in the enjoyment of my estates, after the death of my parents, and devoted myself to the call of my large mercantile interests, for I had several ships in the East India trade."

"A year after the death of my mother, who quickly followed my father to the grave, I married, and the lady was one who had discarded my brother Bianca, for she never loved him."

"Our little boy that was born to us died soon after his birth, and under mysterious circumstances."

"Then your mother was taken ill, and I nearly lost her; but she recovered, and one day I was shot at and wounded, while returning home from a hunt."

"I felt that my brothers were the guilty ones, and caring nothing for the title I held, and possessed of riches I had made, outside of the estates, after a long talk with your mother, I determined to yield them up, and in such a way that I would be supposed to be dead and the next heir, Rafael, enjoy the prize he coveted."

"For this purpose I fitted out a vessel, with all we should need in the New World, and ordered her to a certain part of the coast near my home."

"Then your mother, with two faithful servants, went sailing one day in my little yacht, when it threatened a storm, and after nightfall we boarded my vessel, capsized the pleasure craft and set it adrift."

"It was washed ashore, and we were naturally supposed to be lost, and Rafael was of course the next heir."

"So thoroughly did I drop the past, and wish to wash out every memory of my brothers, that I never spoke of them, and never tried to find out one thing regarding them."

"Purchasing our present home upon Long Island, I was content to turn farmer, and yet was drawn into sea service, after the death of your mother, and became skipper of a vessel in the Boston and New York trade, and, as you know, Sibyl, I but added to my fortune, until your inheritance will be far larger than it would have been from my English estate."

"And also, you have been equally as well nurtured and educated, while to-day, from the sea service you have seen with me, you are as fit to command a vessel as are half the skippers I have met."

"Having been chased by the Sea Torch, I recognized her, and so dreaded to see you fall into the hands of a pirate, little dreaming that that pirate was my own brother."

"His words told me that poor Rafael had been wrongly judged by me in the past, for he is now in possession of the title and estates of Norman-Hurst, and has doubtless been the victim of Bianca's plotting, as I have been."

"Then, when I left England, Bianca was a midshipman in the British Navy, and now I find him, alas! a pirate, and a curse to mankind."

"But, thanks to that noble young American officer, we escaped from his clutches, and we can return to our home on the Atlantic, and there dwell in peace, for Bianca will never track us there."

"Such, my dear child, is the story of my past life, and bitter indeed is the thought that I have to tell you of my brother's crime."

"You are not guilty, father, for no one could have done more than you did for your brothers, and if one has turned pirate, he has his own crimes alone to answer for, so bury him from all memory once more as you have in the past, and we will not let his evil deeds make our lives unhappy."

"You are the dear, noble girl I thought you, Sibyl; but hark! a boat is coming alongside, for there is a hail," and as the skipper spoke Bronx appeared at the cabin companionway to report the return of the surgeon, and along with him Lieutenant Moncrief of the Scorpion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE JEALOUS SAILOR.

SIBYL HURST had seen the young commander of the cruiser under the glare of battle-lanterns, and heard his voice when it had the stern ring of warfare, and he had impressed her then in a manner that never had man moved her before.

Taken up with her grief for her father, whom she feared she would see die ere another sun should rise, she had not regarded Manton Moncrief as otherwise she would have done; but he had been often in her thoughts, and the surgeon's story of the gallant sailor had interested her greatly.

When, therefore, he was ushered into the cabin, where she sat by the side of her father, she arose to greet him, and to thank him for his great kindness to them.

She saw the face no longer lighted up with the fire of conflict, and heard a voice that was soft and full of the sympathy that Moncrief's looks portrayed, while the pressure of his hand, though firm, was the grasp of a friend.

"I certainly am most glad to see you improving so rapidly, Captain Hurst," said the young commander, as he took a seat by the wounded man.

Then followed a pleasant chat upon general topics, and Manton Moncrief was well entertained and left the brig to return to his schooner with the knowledge that the skipper and his daughter were no ordinary people.

With the sunset the wind arose, and it brought with it a brig-of-war flying the British flag.

"Hold on for port, and I will throw myself between you and the Englishman," signaled Manton Moncrief from his vessel, and the Mermaid was crowded with all the sail that her jury rig would bear.

"That brig is larger than the schooner," said Sibyl, as she stood on deck watching the preparations of the American to throw himself in the way of the Englishman.

She addressed the surgeon, who answered:

"Yes; and she has a very heavy armament, I notice."

"It seems cowardly that we should run away and leave the schooner to fight our battles," Sibyl remarked.

"No, Miss Hurst, for the cargo of this vessel is worth more than a ship of the line, just now."

"But, Surgeon Bennett, your place is on board your own vessel, for there will be wounded men for you to look after before long, and I can care for my father now," and Sibyl spoke with sudden earnestness, as the thought flashed through her mind.

"Miss Hurst, that was my own thought, though I did not wish to ask my release of you."

"Then go, I beg of you, for you can take the gig and readily reach the schooner."

"I thank you, and I will do so," was the answer, and the surgeon hastily entered the cabin to visit the skipper, gave Sibyl a few instructions as to the care of her father, and ascending to the deck, found the gig ready for him.

"I hope we will soon see you in Charleston, Surgeon Bennett, and for all you have done for us I sincerely thank you."

"My thanks also to Lieutenant Moncrief, and prayers for his victory," said Sibyl, as she grasped the hand of the surgeon, who bowed low, and with a few words of farewell, went over the side into the gig.

The brig at once signaled the schooner of his coming, and the answer came back thanking Sibyl, and bidding her to crowd the brig with all she would bear, adding:

"This is a formidable foe, and if he defeats me he will press on after you; but I shall fight him to the last, so as to detain him from pursuing the brig."

"A noble man," muttered Sibyl, as she turned to Bronx and said:

"We must push the brig to her utmost, Bronx, for the schooner is no match for her."

"So I think, Sibyl," was the reply of the young mate, who added in an undertone to himself:

"I am sorry to wish it, but I hope the Englishman will sink the schooner, for that handsome young captain is becoming a dangerous rival."

It was twilight now, and the wind, freshening briskly, was sending the brig swiftly along.

The Scorpion had maneuvered so as to lead the British brig away from the Mermaid, but seeing that the Englishman seemed to divine his motive, and considering the crippled brig a valuable craft, held on after her. Manton Moncrief at once headed back so as to throw himself between the two.

As he did so he opened fire upon the Englishman, who, anxious to end the little schooner's career, gave a broadside in return, and once again held on after the Mermaid.

But Manton Moncrief still held on his course, to cross the bows of the British craft, and saw that he would do so, unless he was greatly damaged, and thus give the Mermaid over a league start.

This maneuvering Sibyl saw from the deck of the Mermaid, and it was very plain to her that Manton Moncrief meant to save the brig and its valuable cargo, even at the sacrifice of the schooner.

"He is a plucky fellow, that young captain, for he must know that he has no chance with that British brig," said Bronx, admiring the courage of his rival, for such he was, as the young mate's words had admitted.

The fact was that Hugh Bronx was a young sailor whose mother's farm adjoined that of Captain Hurst, and he loved Sibyl from the time she was a little girl of twelve, and always looked upon her as his especial property.

They had been "sweethearts," as it were, and Sibyl had always liked him, though the idea of real love for the fine-looking young sailor had never entered her heart or brain.

Hugh Bronx had been a sailor six months in the year from boyhood on his father's coasting packet that ran from Boston to New York, going through Long Island Sound and touching at Newport, New London and Sag Harbor.

Skipper Bronx was a farmer as well as a sailor and left his wife and son a comfortable home when he was lost at sea one night of storm, when Hugh, by a fortunate accident was not on board, and thus became his mother's protector.

Hugh was a fine young fellow, devoted to his mother, whom he idolized, and was very content to give up the sea to be near Sibyl.

When Skipper Hurst built his brig at Sag Harbor, Hugh Bronx was of great help to him in many ways, and when the Mermaid sailed with the valuable cargo on board, he had been offered the position of second mate, and gladly accepted it, Captain Hurst remarking:

"Sibyl is my first mate, Hugh, for she goes with me, and the Mermaid belongs to her; but if you care to go as second mate the berth is yours."

Hugh Bronx was delighted, and in fact would have gone as an ordinary seaman, or cabin steward, to be near Sibyl, and thus it is that the reader finds the young sailor on board, yielding to the fair commander of the Mermaid perfect obedience in all things.

But Bronx was by no means blind, and desperately jealous, and so he found himself wishing two such dangerous individuals as were Lieutenant Moncrief and Surgeon Bennett out of the way.

"These fine manners, brass buttons and rank will turn her head from poor plain Hugh Bronx," he muttered to himself over and over again, until he grew really revengeful toward them in his deep-seated jealousy.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SACRIFICE.

WITH his manliness asserting itself, Hugh Bronx had openly praised the pluck of Manton Moncrief, who so boldly threw himself in the way of the English cruiser as a sacrifice to save the Mermaid and her valuable cargo.

As the shadows darkened upon the sea, and the Mermaid held on her way as swiftly as her limited rig would admit of, Sibyl went into the cabin, leaving Hugh Bronx at the wheel.

The wounded skipper lay there, gazing out of the stern cabin ports upon the English and American cruisers, both of which he could see, and Sibyl took a seat near him and where she could watch them also.

"Who has the deck, my child?" asked the wounded man.

"Bronx," answered Sibyl, who had dropped into her father's way of calling the young sailor Bronx on board ship when ashore it was Hugh.

"Is the Mermaid doing her best?"

"Yes, father."

"She is really seeming to make wonderful time for the rig she has."

"She is, father. The Mermaid is a remarkable boat, and you deserve the greatest credit for your model."

"I have an idea of making her into a schooner, Sibyl."

Lieutenant Moncrief seemed to think she would do better under such rig, father, and be more easily handled and go far faster."

"I shall have her changed then as soon as we reach port."

"But you certainly will not command her, father?"

"No, my sea life is over, my child; but I would present her to that gallant young lieutenant, who richly deserves her, and, my word for it, he will win a name in her; but of course you have the say as to whether I shall do so or not."

"I do not think she could serve our country in better hands, sir, and from present appearances, I believe he will need a vessel very soon."

"Ah! you refer to his present daring attack upon the pirate to save us?"

"Yes, sir."

"They are both opening now, pretty hotly, and the schooner's fire is coolly delivered and with good aim."

"Yes, sir; but the Englishman is double the schooner's tonnage, her armament is twice as heavy, and she carries two to one in the number of her crew, for I examined her closely through my glass," and there was anxiety in the voice and face of the maiden.

"Then he has no chance."

"I do not think that he expected to, father."

"Why should he risk such a combat, then?"

"To save this brig only, sir."

"That is it, you may depend upon it, for he is just the man to do such a thing; but I am glad you sent the surgeon back to his post of duty, Sibyl."

"Yes, sir, for there will be work for him to do; but see, the schooner gives the brig a broadside," and as Sibyl spoke the broadside of the Scorpion was turned upon the Englishman.

It was too dark to see the effect, but the brig returned the fire promptly, and at once the firing became hot and rapid.

The flashes of the guns showed Sibyl and her father just where the two vessels were, and that the schooner would not leave her position between the enemy and the escaping Mermaid.

The Englishman fired furiously and fast, and it seemed strange that the little schooner could take such punishment; but the plucky American kept up his slow but steady fire, and still held his own, it seemed.

Further and further away sped the Mermaid, until at last the fire of the two vessels seemed to mingle together, as the flashes were visible, and Sibyl said:

"Father, they are broadside to broadside now."

"It can end but one way, Sibyl, though the American is making a fight I did not believe possible."

"Ha! that was a broadside from the brig at short range!"

"Yes, sir, and the schooner replies feebly," answered Sibyl.

"There, see those flashes! that means small-arms now, and the heavy guns have ceased."

"Hark! hear those cries at even this great distance— Not that was the schooner's broadside, ay, and the brig answers, so they have not yet boarded," and Captain Hunt seemed so greatly excited that Sibyl, ever watchful of him, said:

"Father, you must not endanger your own life, sir, so please lie back upon your pillow, or I shall have to close the ports and shut out the sight."

"True, I was too excited, my child; but I cannot help it, when I see such superb pluck as that noble Moncrief is showing."

"Go on deck, please, and see that the brig does not lose an inch, wet the sails and make her fly, for it will be too bad, after Moncrief's sacrifice, to have this craft captured."

"Then you think the schooner will be taken, father?"

"It cannot be otherwise, my child."

"Hark! there comes the rattle of small-arms again, and the heavy firing has ceased, so they must be boarding."

"I will go on deck, sir," and Sibyl hastened from the cabin, and bade Hugh Bronx to have the sails wetted, and do all he could to increase the speed of the brig.

Taking the helm herself, she held the Mermaid on her course unswervingly, while the firing far across the sea gradually died away, the flashes became less frequent, and then darkness and silence reigned.

"She is making eight knots, Sibyl, and can do no more," said Hugh Bronx, coming aft and joining the fair girl as she stood by the wheel.

"No, she can do no more, come what may, Bronx; but the fight has ended between the Scorpion and British brig."

"Yes, and a superb fight it was for that brave fellow to fight the Britisher, Sibyl; but it is over, as you say."

"Yes, and one of those vessels is a prize to the other now."

"It can only be the schooner that has struck her flag," was the disconsolate reply of the young seaman, while through his brain flashed the thought:

"I wonder if Moncrief and his surgeon were killed?"

CHAPTER IX.

A PRIZE IN THE OFFING.

As the night passed on, and the best glass could not show any vessel in chase of the brig, Sibyl began to feel that perhaps the English-

man had not triumphed, and she so expressed herself to Hugh Bronx, who shook his head as reply.

When the sun arose the following morning and no sail was visible in their wake, not a bit of canvas upon the vast expanse of water, Sibyl told her father that perhaps, after all, the schooner had proven the victor.

"No, my child, that could not be," was the answer.

"Then why has not the English brig come on in chase, for we have not changed our course?"

"True, but the Britisher has good reasons for not overhauling us, Sibyl."

"And those reasons?"

"Moncrief punished her so, even if he was forced to strike his flag, that she was unable to pursue us without repairs."

"That seems reasonable," said Sibyl, while Bronx remarked, for he was at breakfast in the cabin with the skipper and his daughter:

"Yes, Captain Hurst, the Englishman won the fight, without a doubt; but he was in no condition to crow over it, after the terrific fire the Scorpion poured upon him."

"I sincerely hope that Lieutenant Moncrief was not killed," and Sibyl's face paled at the thought.

Hugh Bronx saw this, and it came into his mind:

"Ah! it is the lieutenant then, rather than the surgeon."

"I will see."

So he said aloud:

"I would not be surprised if the loss on the Scorpion was fearful."

"In fact it could not be otherwise under such a fire."

"We could afford to lose men, Hugh, and many of them, to save this brig's cargo; but I do not think Lieutenant Moncrief could be replaced very soon to the navy," said Sibyl.

"And his surgeon is a fine fellow too," suggested the young sailor.

"Yes, a good commander makes a good officer; but Surgeon Bennett is not to be named with Lieutenant Moncrief."

"Ah! the cat is out of the bag," thought Bronx.

"I see now that it was the young commander of the schooner, and not the surgeon, as I half thought."

"Well, I hope that Manton Moncrief fell under the fire of the Englishman, though I can almost hate myself for the thought; but no man must come between me and my love for that girl," and, impressed by his jealous, revengeful feelings the young sailor arose from the table and went on deck, while Captain Hurst remarked:

"What ails Hugh of late, for he does not seem himself?"

"He is anxious about you, father, and for the safety of the Mermaid, well knowing what a dire calamity it would be did her cargo not reach the Carolinas."

Such was Sibyl's explanation, but she too had noticed the manner of Hugh Bronx, and into her woman's mind was stealing the thought that she was the cause, for the young sailor had shown to her the same gloomy nature several times before, when other beaux were attentive to her, for, beautiful and an heiress, the maiden had many admirers among the sterner sex, and her lovers could be numbered by the score, though she had never shown a preference to any one, unless that one was the mate of the Mermaid.

So the good vessel held on her way, all anxiously watching for a sail in chase, and rejoicing when none was seen.

Toward the afternoon of the next day land was sighted, and by sunset the crippled brig had passed in by the forts and dropped anchor in Charleston Harbor, the gantlet having been safely run, while it becoming known that the vessel brought much needed arms, ammunition and stores for the American forces in the Carolinas, the whole town was illuminated, and guns were fired in honor of the brave skipper and his crew.

Captain Hurst had in Charleston an old merchant friend, who dwelt in a lordly home upon the shore of the harbor, and he at once boarded the brig and insisted that the skipper and his daughter should be the guests of his mansion while they were in the town, and so it was decided, greatly to the joy of Sibyl, who knew that her father would receive far better care ashore than he could on the Mermaid, and be most comfortable besides.

Poor Hugh Bronx urged against it, as he said it would be dangerous to remove the skipper in his then weak condition; but his real reason was that he feared to have Sibyl go where she would be surrounded by the young officers stationed there.

But the skipper was safely moved, and that night rested comfortably in luxurious quarters in the fine mansion of his friend, Major Perry White, the commander of one of the water batteries near.

The grounds were extensive, beautifully ornamented with trees, shrubs and flowers in profusion, and from her windows Sibyl could see on one side the Mermaid, hauled in alongside

of the Government dock, and discharging her valuable cargo, and upon the other the distant sea and the forts.

It was decided that the brig should go at once upon the stocks for repairs, and to have a schooner rig in place of her other, and as this would take several weeks, both the skipper and Sibyl settled themselves comfortably in their new quarters for that length of time.

After a reception the next night by the major and his wife, in their grand parlors, which all the prominent people of the town attended, and at which Sibyl was made a heroine, she retired to her room at midnight.

It was starlight, and, seated in her window, she gazed out upon the scene of beauty before her.

Far out upon the sea she beheld a light, and then another, moving slowly along, and getting her glass, which she had brought with her, she turned it out upon the dark waters.

"They are vessels, but more I cannot make out."

"Doubtless they are some of the English blockading fleet, which were fortunately absent when we ran in, or the Mermaid, after all, might not have escaped."

So she said to herself, and watching the lights for some time, she saw them remain stationary, and the more convinced that they were English cruisers that often blockaded the port, she retired to rest.

She was awakened by voices outside, and at once recognized one speaking as Hugh Bronx.

The sun was shining brightly, and she knew that she had slept late, so arose quickly and dressed herself.

What she heard Hugh say caused her to go to the window overlooking the sea and throw it open.

There were two vessels in the offing, evidently those whose lights she had seen the night before.

Taking up her glass she leveled it upon one of the craft, and instantly her face paled as she muttered:

"It is the Scorpion."

There indeed was the little American cruiser, but the joy at sight of her was turned to sorrow at the sight of the English flag flying at her peak, with the United States colors beneath, showing beyond all doubt how the fierce combat had ended.

"I feared it; but is he dead?" she murmured, as the tears came into her eyes.

Completing her toilet, she ran into her father's room.

Hugh was there, having just been brought up-stairs by Major White, with whom he had been talking out upon the piazza when their voices awakened the young girl.

"Oh, father! the schooner is the prize of the English brig!" cried Sibyl.

"Ah! you know that, do you, Miss Sibyl?" said the major, adding:

"Our young friend here, Mate Bronx, just came over to inform your father of the fact."

"Good-morning, Miss Sibyl," said Hugh, in a constrained way, but not noticing his cold manner, she took his hand and said pleasantly:

"Good-morning, Hugh."

Then she went over to where her father lay, kissed him tenderly and said:

"I hope you feel better this morning."

"Yes, I am steadily improving, my child; but this is bad news Bronx brings us, though not unexpected."

"Yes, father; I saw those vessels come to anchor last night, from my window."

"I wish we could learn if that gallant fellow, Moncrief, is dead or alive," said the skipper.

"Could he not be exchanged, sir, under flag of truce? as I heard the general say last night that he had quite a number of British officers prisoners," Sibyl remarked, and Hugh bit his lip at her suggestion.

"A good idea, Miss Sibyl, and I shall speak to the general on the subject to-day, for Moncrief's fame has reached us here, and we would give much to see him again upon an armed deck," Major White responded.

"How does the work on the brig progress, Bronx?" asked the skipper.

"We have her out of the water, sir, and the workmen begin to work on her this morning, while I selected two superb masts and spars for the schooner rig," was the reply.

"If she was armed and ready, and such a man as Moncrief in command, he would go out, retake his schooner, and capture that Englishman, I verily believe," said the skipper, with enthusiasm; and the idea seemed to impress Hugh Bronx, for he muttered to himself as he left the mansion:

"And why should not I do as well as Manton Moncrief?"

CHAPTER X.

FROM OUT THE SEA.

ALL day long the angry townspeople kept their eyes upon the vessels in the offing, the defiant British brig and its prize, and many bewailed that there was no way to retake the American schooner, and prayed that some cruiser, bearing

the flag of the States, might put in an appearance to engage the saucy Englishman.

But no such good luck came, and night fell with the brig and her prize still lying at anchor.

After supper Sibyl wandered out upon the piazza.

She was alone, for her father lay in his room, the major's duties had called him away, and Mrs. White was something of an invalid.

From the piazza Sibyl strolled through the grounds toward a rustic arbor upon the harbor shore.

It was upon a point of land, jutting out from the grounds, and was a favorite resort with the inmates of the mansion in the late afternoon and upon balmy nights.

From the point she could see the lights of the two vessels in the offing and she seated herself in the arbor and gazed upon them with strange feelings filling her heart.

"Would that I knew his fate."

"Would that I knew whether he was dead or alive?"

So she murmured, and over her stole the thought that she was becoming deeply interested in the handsome young naval officer.

"There are vessels in this harbor that could be manned and run out to attack the Englishman, if some one had the pluck to lead."

"If I were only a man I would throw a crew on board some vessel, arm them thoroughly, run out and board that Englishman before he could get his anchor up, and fight it out upon his own deck for victory or defeat," she said, with a sternness of tone that was not like her usual voice, so full of music and richness.

For a long time she sat there, lost in deep thought, and then her eyes fell upon a dark object upon the waters.

The night was starlight, though clouds were beginning to sweep over the heavens, and she could see the object that had caught her eyes, sweeping along upon the inflowing tide.

Nearer it came, until she heard a splash, and then the object divided in two, one coming toward the shore, at the very point where she was seated.

"It is too small for a boat," she murmured.

"Yes, it is a swimmer, and he will land here."

"He was evidently floating on a spar, or a sunken boat," and she watched the moving head as it neared the shore.

Reaching the sandy point the swimmer staggered out of the depths, and shaking himself like a huge Newfoundland dog, stood as though resting.

Then he glanced toward the two vessels in the offing, and shaking his clinched fist at them said aloud:

"Remain where you are, proud Englishman, for a short while longer, and if I find the brave hearts I hope to in this port, I'll lower your flag for you, or die in the attempt."

He evidently did not suspect that any one was near, and turning, started toward the path that led up to the mansion.

"Captain Moncrief!"

The man started, gazed about him for an instant, and then said:

"Did I hear my name spoken by human lips, or was it an angel's voice?"

"Captain Moncrief, I welcome you out of the sea," and Sibyl stepped forward and grasped his hand, all wet though it was.

"Miss Hurst!"

He fairly gasped the words.

"Yes, I am Sibyl Hurst."

"And the brig arrived in safety, then?"

"Yes; thanks to your noble sacrifice, sir."

"I suppose it was a sacrifice, Miss Hurst, for I lost my schooner," he said, with a smile.

"After a most desperate battle with a foe double your size."

"Yes, it was the worst fight I ever fought; but I was determined the brig should escape."

"It looked cowardly in us to run off and leave you."

"Oh, no, for your cargo was not to be risked for human life."

"No, without guns, and with but a few men, and crippled craft, you could only run for it, and I am happy you escaped."

"Tell me of your combat, Captain Moncrief."

"There is little to tell, though my men and vessel suffered terribly, in fact, half my crew were slain or wounded; but I kept pegging away at the brig, hoping to cut away her masts and prevent her pursuit of you, while, with my spars still unharmed, I could get away with my schooner."

"Finding I could not cut down her masts, I determined to board her, or run her down, so as to sink her, and I did the latter, my helmsman losing his nerve, just as he came near, and failing to strike her fair."

"I boarded him, but it was a useless fight, and seeing that he could not give chase for hours, as he was in no condition to do so, I stopped the slaughter on both sides and surrendered."

"And you were not harmed yourself?" anxiously asked Sibyl.

"Did not get a scratch, as you may know, when I tell you that I swam from the British brig into the harbor, when I came up with a floating spar that helped me greatly."

"I just left it to land here, feeling that I would find friends to our cause at yonder mansion."

"But how did you escape, Captain Moncrief?"

"I have, fortunately, a very small hand, Miss Hurst, and they put me below decks with a number of my crew, placing irons on one wrist of all of us, and chaining us to the decks."

The iron on my wrist I discovered, was a large one, so to-night I slipped it off, lowered myself from the open port and struck out for the shore, whispering to the one nearest to me, and who was Surgeon Bennett, that I intended to risk the long swim."

"The tide was running in, as I had observed before making the attempt, and I thought that I might find men who would go with me and recapture my schooner."

"Captain Moncrief, you are a brave man indeed, and I am so glad that you are free; but how selfish of me to keep you here, wet and tired as you are, when you need dry clothing and food."

"Come, my father and myself are guests here at Major Perry White's mansion, and you will be most welcome, for Captain Moncrief, the Dashing Privateersman, as you are called, is by no means unknown here."

"Thank you, Miss Hurst, I will accompany you, with pleasure; but, if I can get a volunteer crew and a craft here, I will be better known, for I intend to recapture my schooner," was the determined response of Manton Moncrief, as he walked along with Sibyl toward the mansion.

CHAPTER XI.

HUGH BRONX'S PLOT.

A WARM welcome was given to the young officer, by both Captain Hurst and Major White for the latter had returned to the mansion, and were in the skipper's room when Sibyl entered with Manton Moncrief.

Dry clothing was at once given him by the major, a warm supper was ordered, and while discussing this, with a good appetite, after his few days of hard fare as a prisoner, the lieutenant told again the story of his combat and escape.

"The British brig lost heavily," he added, "and was so badly cut up that it took a day to make repairs, before the Mermaid could be followed, and so we were late in arriving off this port."

"And are your men all on board the brig, Lieutenant Moncrief?" asked Major White.

"No, the wounded men were left on the schooner, and the rest of us were taken on board the brig."

"And you think the schooner could be taken, as she now lies?"

"Yes, I think a boat attack could be made, boarding the schooner, slipping his cable, and getting in under the cover of the forts before the brig could do us much damage; but my idea was to take men enough to capture the schooner, and then run her aboard the brig and carry her by boarding."

"What force has the brig?"

"About a hundred men on the brig, and thirty as a prize crew on the schooner."

"She had a crew of a hundred and sixty, and sixteen guns; but her loss was considerable in killed and wounded in the action."

"You think a boat attack would be safer than going in a vessel?"

"Yes, Major White, for a vessel would be sighted, and her object divined, for they know there is no American cruiser now in port."

"Boats, with muffled oars, could creep well up before being seen, and more, they could board before much resistance could be offered, while sending picked men to slip the cable and set sail at once, others could fight for mastery as we sailed for the brig, which would have but little time to prepare for resistance, as she lies but a good cable's length from the Scorpion."

"And you would need about how many men, sir?"

"I would risk it with a hundred."

"I will supply you with the boats and men to-morrow night, Lieutenant Moncrief, for your plan is a good one—well orderly, what is it?" and the major turned to a soldier who just then entered the supper room.

"A large vessel has just passed out by the forts, sir, and Captain Griffin told me to report it to you, sir."

"Ah! what can she be?" asked the major in surprise.

"He said he received this note, sir, shortly before she came down," and the sergeant handed the major a note.

It was addressed to

"COMMANDER Harbor Forts."

Opening it he read aloud:

"SIR:—It is my intention to run out to-night and attack the British brig and schooner in the offing, so kindly let me pass unchallenged, as I wish my plans kept secret to the last."

"I secured a merchant barque to-day, and a couple of heavy guns I mounted upon her bows, while I have a crew of seventy men, and by surprising the enemy, hope to take him."

"Very Respectfully,"

"HUGH BRONX,
Second Mate of Brig Mermaid."

This letter was a great surprise to Sibyl, and she clapped her hands with delight and cried:

"Bravo for Bronx! it is just like the brave fellow; but he has taken the wind out of your sails, Lieutenant Moncrief."

"Yes, he has saved you the risk of an attack in boats, sir; but how perfectly quiet he kept the whole thing, for he was here this morning and said nothing about his plot," the major remarked.

But Manton Moncrief looked serious, and said:

"I am sorry he has gone, for that English commander is too wide awake not to notice a large vessel approaching, and he has a heavy armament, and the barque and her brave crew will suffer, while Mr. Bronx has not men enough for the work without a perfect surprise— Ah! there is a heavy gun, and the Englishman has sighted the approach of the barque," and all hastened to an upper room, that commanded a perfect view of the harbor and the vessels in the offing.

When they arrived there the roar of heavy guns filled the air, and far out upon the waters the red flashes lighted up the sea and rendered the vessels visible.

The barque was heading directly toward the British brig, and not half a mile from her, while her two pieces of artillery were being fired rapidly upon her.

In return, she was receiving the fire of both the brig and the schooner, while both vessels were rapidly getting up anchor and setting sail to meet the attack.

"He is foolhardy," said the major.

"Yes, he will be captured."

And Sibyl turned her gaze upon the face of Lieutenant Moncrief, to see what he thought of the young mate's reckless attack.

But Moncrief said nothing, and kept a glass to his eye, intently gazing at the scene.

"You see he stands on, in spite of the double fire, Lieutenant Moncrief, and he may win yet," cried the major.

"He acts like a desperate man, Major White, rather than a brave one, for he has but two small guns, a large, slow-sailing barque, and a crew he certainly does not know, as he has had no opportunity to try them, and he will simply become a prize for the Englishman," was the reply of the young sailor.

"Egad! you are right. See there!"

As the major spoke, the bowsprit of the barque was shot away, the vessel lay to, and the brig and the schooner, now under sail, headed rapidly down upon the ill-fated craft.

"She has surrendered; too bad!" said Moncrief, as, a few moments after, the firing ceased and silence reigned out upon the waters.

"Yes, Hugh has been foolhardy, and sealed his own fate," Sibyl said.

"Major White?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Moncrief."

"The men you were to supply me with are soldiers, are they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"From the harbor forts?"

"Yes."

"Are there any seamen in the port, sir?"

"Yes, a few on merchant vessels."

"Could I get, say, twenty-five or thirty?"

"Certainly."

"To-night?"

"It would be difficult to do so to-night, sir."

"I will try it, sir, and if you will have your soldiers, say four-score men, ready for me within three hours, I will come by the forts with what sailors I can get."

"Do you mean to go out to-night, sir?" asked the amazed major.

"Yes, just as soon as I can do so, for the Englishman will not expect another attack to-night," was the quiet response, and ten minutes after Manton Moncrief and Major White left the mansion to carry out the bold plan of the young sailor, to capture the British vessel and retake the prizes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NIGHT EXPEDITION.

WHAT Moncrief set forth to do, he did quickly and well, so that it was but a short while after leaving the white mansion before he had thirty good seamen under his command.

Major White had driven him to the place where the merchant vessels lay, and the young sailor had at once set about getting a crew, while the soldier went down to his forts to pick out his men for the daring expedition.

Having secured four good men and a boat, Moncrief rowed from vessel to vessel, told his errand and secured from on board one craft two men, from another three, and so on until he had the number he wished.

He picked out the best boats for rowing and carrying men, had the oars securely muffled and then set out for the forts.

It was after midnight when he reached the fort where Major White awaited him, his men, four-score in number, drawn up in line upon the sandy beach, armed to the teeth, but stripped of all extra clothing.

"Men, there is honor to be gained in your to-night's work, and plenty of prize money too, so I want no man to go with me who fears to die,

and is not willing to obey my orders to the death.

"If there is any such man in this party, be he sailor or soldier, let him step out now, for he will be only in the way of good men and true in the expedition I have on hand to-night."

So spoke the young sailor and not a man moved from the soldier's ranks, or came out of the boats lying at the shore, though all heard the terse words addressed to them.

"Men, I would say to you, that you may feel confidence in your leader, that this is Lieutenant Manton Moncrief, the Dashing Privateersman, who this night escaped from the British brig, by swimming ashore, and who is determined to retake his schooner and rescue the gallant American prisoners held upon those vessels in the offing," and at Major White's words the men would have broken forth in a cheer, had they not been quickly checked.

"My men, I wish to divide you into two parties, one of fifteen seamen and sixty soldiers to make a dash with me upon the schooner, the other party, under a gallant captain here, consisting of as many seamen and twenty soldiers, to board and carry the barque captured to-night, and which lies near the brig-of-war."

"The seamen are to get up anchor and set sail at once, while the soldiers are to do the fighting."

Once under way, the schooner and barque are to head for the British cruiser, board her and carry her thus:

"Once you have the barque in your possession, Captain Bainbridge," and Moncrief turned to the young soldier who was to be second in command, and to whom the major had introduced him:

"You will release the prisoners on board, for they will aid you greatly."

With these few orders the sailor commander bade Major White good-by, bowed to the officers of the fort who were there, and entered his boat, the soldiers quickly following his example.

The forces were then divided into two boat columns, there being three boats in one and six in the other, all with oars heavily muffled, and weighted deep in the water so as to present as little obstacle as possible for the sharp-eyed lookout on the vessels to discover.

Silently they sped away in the darkness, followed by the good wishes of the officers and men in the fort, all of whom stood at their posts waiting for the conflict that must soon begin.

Not a word was spoken on the boats, the oars rose and fell without sound, and the tide, which had turned, aided their advance toward the enemy.

The lights from the three vessels were visible, for the captured barque lay in a line with the brig and the schooner, and a quarter of a mile only divided the British cruiser from the Scorpion and her other prize.

"There is your game, Captain Bainbridge, and, you know my instructions," said Moncrief in a whisper, addressing the soldier, whose boat was alongside of his own.

"All right, Captain Moncrief."

"Good-night and success," was the low response, and the two columns of boats passed, one heading toward the schooner, the other for the barque.

There was a light wind, and the sea was quiet, and as the night had come on dark, owing to heavy clouds obscuring the skies, the boats were hardly visible half a cable's length away, as Moncrief was glad to observe when he parted with Captain Bainbridge.

Seated in the window in her father's room, Sibyl had awaited the attack.

The skipper, knowing what was going on could not sleep, and as he knew that Sibyl would not retire until she knew what the result would be, he had asked her to come into his room.

There she had been seated, conversing in a low tone with her father, while she watched and waited.

With her strong glass she could see the distant vessels, the lights of the three rising and falling upon the swell, and the suspense was awful, for she had noted the boats passing down the harbor and knew that they must be rowing out to the death-struggle.

"They must soon attack, my child, unless the expedition has been given up to-night," said the skipper.

"No, father, for Major White would have returned had it been given up."

"True, and Moncrief is not a man to give up what he undertakes, but it will be dawn soon."

"Not for more than an hour yet, father— Ah!"

The cry came from her lips, as bright flashes suddenly became visible far out upon the waters, and to their ears came the sound of fire-arms that told her the attack had begun.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT FOR MASTERY.

"It has begun, Sibyl," said the skipper, moving uneasily in his excitement.

"Yes, father."

"Which vessel has he attacked?"

"The schooner and the barque."

"You can see?"

"Yes, sir, for the flashes of the fire-arms render the vessels visible."

"And the Englishman?"

"Is setting sail I think, sir, and getting up anchor."

"He is not firing?"

"No, sir, for he has prize crews upon both the barque and schooner, you know."

"True."

For a moment no word was spoken, and then Sibyl cried exultantly:

"They have carried the schooner!"

"How do you know?"

"She is under way, her sails are being set rapidly, and she heads for the brig."

"Bravo! Moncrief is there, my child."

"Yes, father."

"And the barque?"

"Is now moving, sir, but they are fighting fiercely upon her decks, as you can hear by the firing."

"Yes; but is there no firing upon the schooner?"

"No, sir."

"Then she is certainly captured."

"True, father."

"And the barque?"

"There is still fighting on board, in the fore-castle, though she is sailing along."

"In which direction?"

"Toward the brig."

"And the brig?"

"Is crowding on sail, though her anchor is not yet up, sir."

"Ha! what is that?"

"The schooner, father."

"She has opened upon the brig?"

"Yes, sir; and is standing down to board her."

"Bravo Moncrief!"

"He will win, father, for the fighting on the barque is over."

"But our men may not have won."

"True, father; but she heads toward the brig."

"That may be to aid her, my child."

"Yes, sir; but do you hear those cries?"

"I do, indeed."

"They seem to come from the schooner and the barque."

"And hark! the British answer them, and their cheer is louder."

"No, father, not that last cheer is from the forts, sir, and I am sure that Lieutenant Moncrief is, so far, the winner."

"But the brig is yet to be taken?"

"Yes, sir; and she is opening fire on both the barque and schooner, for she is now moving."

"I wonder if he will run?"

"She cannot now, sir, if she would."

"Why, because the schooner is laying alongside of her— Great Heavens!"

"My child! my child! what has happened?"

"The barque is on fire, father!"

"Ha! then many lives will be lost!"

"The flames are breaking out in half a dozen places!"

"What are the men doing?"

"Her decks are crowded, sir, and they are laying her to."

"They have boats?"

"Yes, sir, and are going into them now."

"They have those the attacking party boarded in, and are lowering those from the barque's davits, and are working rapidly."

"They have need to."

"Yes, sir; for the flames gain headway with wonderful rapidity."

"Heaven save the poor wounded fellows on board!"

"The boats are putting away, sir."

"What! and deserting their comrades to the fire?"

"Alas! it seems so, sir."

"Too bad that men should be so inhuman; but what of the brig and schooner?"

"They lie side by side, sir, and the fight is raging upon the brig's deck."

"You can see all now, for I notice the glare of the burning bark myself."

"Yes, father; and oh! joy!"

"What is it, child?"

"The three boats that left the barque, sir, are filled with armed men, for the flames glisten upon their weapons, and they are pulling with all haste to the schooner to aid their friends, for a young officer stands in the bow of the leading boat, his sword drawn, and waving them on."

"Brave fellow!"

"And other boats are alongside of the bark, while men are lowering the wounded into them."

"They are not inhuman, after all. But what of the schooner and the brig, child?"

"There is one party driving the other, sir, for they are amidstships now, fighting like demons, yet one side yields slowly."

"And the rescuing boats?"

"Are now reaching the schooner's side; they clamber on board—the young officer leads them—he is upon the brig's bulwark—oh! he has sprung down into the midst of the party that was giving way, and his men follow him!"

"Hark! hear their cries, father!"

"Thank God! down come the British colors

and up goes the American flag, and it is Moncrief that has raised them, for I can see him distinctly with my glass in the vivid glare."

"Father, he has won the fight which Hugh Bronx lost!" and dropping her head upon her hands Sibyl burst into tears of real joy as to her tears came wild cries of triumph from the soldiers at the fort, who seemed delirious with joy.

CHAPTER XIV.

INGRATITUDE.

HAVING convinced herself that it was no optical illusion, but a reality, that Manton Moncrief had won the fight, and so told her father, Sibyl was willing to seek her room and gain the rest she greatly needed after the night of excitement.

She had seen, by the burning bark, that the wounded had been removed, and the boats were rowing to the schooner, which had now drifted apart from the brig, and now lay to not far distant, the British cruiser being in charge of a prize crew.

The flames of the burning vessel also showed her that the forts were crowded with soldiers eagerly watching the scene, and shouts were resounding through the town at the glorious victory won.

"And he is spared, as though he bore a charmed life," murmured Sibyl, as she laid her head upon her pillow.

"And Surgeon Bennett, and poor Hugh, and that gallant young officer who led the attack on the barque and then went to the rescue of the schooner, I hope they are all unharmed," and with this hope in her heart she went to sleep, from which she was awakened by the thundering of heavy guns down the harbor.

In alarm she sprung from the bed and rushed to the window.

The sun had been up for several hours, and what she beheld was a sight that thrilled her heart with pride, for up the harbor came the Scorpion, and astern of her the British brig-of-war, while the forts were firing a salute to the gallant men who had won so brave a battle.

The vessels had been through a fearful ordeal, as their torn bulwarks, spars and sails shewed clearly and they were coming slowly along, towing the boats that held the soldiers from the fort.

As they passed the forts the boats were cast loose, the soldiers cheering wildly, and the two vessels held on their way up toward the city.

Every vestige of the barque had disappeared, so that she had gone up in flame Sibyl well knew.

Dressing herself, Sibyl sought her father's room, and reached the window just as the two vessels were passing the mansion.

She saw the flag on the brig-of-war dipped three times, in answer to the waving of her kerchief from the window of the mansion and said:

"Father, Lieutenant Moncrief is on the quarter-deck of the captured brig, and I observe several officers in British uniform by his side, while also with him is the young leader of the attack on the barque, whom I recognize now as Captain Robert Bainbridge who was at the major's reception the other night."

"Yes Major White spoke of him as a splendid dashing fellow, rich and handsome, and told me he seemed to fall desperately in love with you, Sibyl," said the skipper slyly.

"Did he, sir?" was the innocent response.

"Who is on the schooner, my child?"

"Hugh Bronx is at her wheel, father."

"I am glad he has escaped unhurt; but from what you say, Moncrief has not confined the British officers below decks, which shows he is a generous foe, for he was put in irons."

"They stand near him, father, gazing at the town as they approach."

"And the town people are mad with delight, I judge, from the cheers that come from that quarter."

"Yes, sir, the shore is a solid mass of people, and a battery is getting ready to fire a salute."

As Sibyl spoke the roar of artillery was heard, firing a salute, the tribute of the town to the gallant deed of the young commander.

Rumor had already spread around that it was Manton Moncrief, the Dashing Privateersman, who had escaped from the British brig, and, with the aid of some soldiers from the forts, under Captain Bainbridge, had retaken his vessel and captured the Englishman, and all gathered about the landing, eager to welcome him as he came on shore.

Major White, after the two vessels had passed the forts, had driven rapidly home to order breakfast prepared, and had then gone to the landing to welcome Moncrief, and request that he and Captain Bainbridge should return home with him.

He also did not forget Hugh Bronx, including him in the invitation, especially as the skipper had expressed a desire to have his mate visit him, and learn about his attack and capture.

Rowing first on board the schooner, the major urged Bronx to accompany him, and he had done so; but his brow grew dark as the boat ran to the side of the English brig, and Lieutenant

Moncrief and Captain Bainbridge also were asked.

"I will go with pleasure, thank you, major, and I feel sure that Captain Bainbridge will not refuse," said Moncrief pleasantly, and turning to the English officers, half a dozen in number, he continued:

"Gentlemen, I accept your parole not to leave the vessel, so will not place you in confinement."

Then Moncrief followed young Bainbridge into the major's boat, which at once pulled for the mansion, disappointing the populace, who had hoped it would land at the town.

Speaking pleasantly to Hugh Bronx, Moncrief said:

"Have you any idea, sir, when Captain Hurst will sail for home?"

"I have not, sir," was the cold reply.

"Could you tell me if he would part with his brig, for I would purchase her of him, if he would do so?"

"You will have to ask Captain Hurst, sir," was the somewhat sullen reply, and Moncrief said no more, as he could not but notice the manner of the young mate.

Arriving at the mansion, Major White welcomed his guests, and at the door they were greeted by Mrs. White and Sibyl.

"Lieutenant Moncrief, I congratulate you with all my heart upon your splendid achievement, and for rescuing our gallant mate here, Mr. Bronx, who so recklessly ran into the lion's mouth," said Sibyl.

"Fate favors some, but it turned its back on me," said Hugh Bronx, in a half-whisper to Sibyl. She turned quickly upon him, saw his dark face full of gloom, and said:

"Hugh, I am so glad to see you safe once more, and you owe much to Lieutenant Moncrief in the way of gratitude."

"I owe him only hatred," was the fierce rejoinder, as the young mate turned away and ascended to the room of the skipper, and unheeding the words of Sibyl:

"Come, Hugh, we are going in to breakfast now, and you can see father afterward."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MATE'S RESOLVE.

"WELL, Bronx, I am glad to see you out of the hands of the Philistines, and Moncrief is deserving of all praise for his gallant rescue of you," said the skipper, as he saw the young sailor enter his room.

"That Moncrief again," hissed Hugh Bronx, as he walked toward the lounge upon which the skipper lay, and grasped his hand.

Aloud he said, shortly:

"Thank you, sir."

"But how secret you kept your expedition."

"Tell me of it."

"There is little to tell, sir, more than that I conceived the idea of rescuing Lieutenant Moncrief and his men, and retaking his vessel."

"It was worthy of you, Hugh; but I fear you were too rash."

"Fate was against me, Captain Hurst, for the barque was slow, the two guns were not worth much, and my men did not know me, or I them, so it was a failure."

"And you were taken?"

"As you know."

"But you had little idea of a release?"

"None, sir, and yet, when it was rumored about the ship, and I heard it, that it was found that Moncrief had escaped, I supposed he would just be fool enough to attempt to capture the Englishman, and I told them so."

"What! do you mean to say you put them on their guard against an attack?" asked the surprised skipper.

The face of the young mate flushed, and he stammered out:

"Oh, no, sir; but I said that if Moncrief safely reached the shore they would hear from him."

"And they did."

"Yes, sir."

"He swam ashore, was here when your attack failed, and at once decided to act, and well did he do it, and you should be overwhelmed with gratitude to him for it, as he saved you from a cruel and long imprisonment."

Hugh Bronx made no reply, but his face worked with the bitter thoughts that seemed to have taken possession of him.

"It was a useless affair, that attack in boats, Hugh."

"Yes, sir."

"Moncrief led the one on the schooner, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Captain Bainbridge led against the barque?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the trouble about the barque?"

"She had as many men on board as were in the attacking party, and when forced to surrender they broke open some oil casks and set the barque on fire."

"Were you on the barque?"

"I was held there as a prisoner, until rescued by Captain Bainbridge."

"And then you went to the aid of Moncrief?"

"I did not, as I remained in charge of the barque, to get the wounded and ten prisoners in the boats."

"And then?"

"That was all, sir, for when we reached the schooner, to which I took the boats, the brig had struck her colors."

"Why, Hugh, you seem strangely indisposed to talk upon the subject."

Hugh Bronx was silent for a minute and then said:

"Captain Hurst, will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly, Hugh, if in my power."

"I am anxious to serve my country, sir, and I wish to purchase from you the Mermaid, arm her and command her as a privateer."

"I will give you so much cash, and my note, secured by my house, for the balance, until she is paid for."

"But, Hugh, I have already decided to give the Mermaid to Moncrief, and I thought you knew that I was having her refitted for him, as a gift?"

"Something was said about it, sir, but I will pay you your price, for I can get privateersman's papers."

"No, Hugh, I will give the Mermaid to Moncrief, for I owe much to him, and I would advise that you seek an officer's berth under him, for I will ask it."

"Never, sir!" and Hugh Bronx spoke with savage earnestness, and seeing the surprised look of the skipper, he added:

"No, Captain Hurst, I can never win fame as a second officer, and I am determined to make a name for myself."

"You know that I am a good seaman, can command men, and I am no coward, so I will risk all chances as captain of a privateer, and as you will not sell me the Mermaid, I must get another vessel."

"Don't be rash, Hugh, for you have had too little experience as an officer, and your experience last night as a commander, was most disastrous."

"I fought fearful odds, sir, and with a green crew."

"Yet Moncrief had no better, and captured the brig, as well as the schooner, also the barque, though he divided his forces, and went in boats at that."

A muttered oath escaped the lips of Hugh Bronx, and he said, sharply:

"Well, I'll yet win as great a name as has Manton Moncrief, Captain Hurst; you mark my words!"

"And I beg now to resign as second mate of the Mermaid."

"Do nothing rashly, Hugh," said the skipper, kindly.

"I will not be rash; but my mind is made up, sir, and I will turn the Mermaid over to boat-swain Brace until her repairs are completed."

"Well, Hugh, I am sorry about your decision; but you know best—so pay yourself from the ship's fund which you have charge of, and if you need more call upon me, while you must keep me aware of what you are doing," said the kind-hearted skipper.

"You will know of me, sir, and before long," was the reply as the young sailor left the room, making an excuse to a servant who came to call him to breakfast, as the family awaited him in the parlors.

"You certainly will go to breakfast with the major, Hugh?" said the skipper.

"No, thank you, captain, for I must get back to the brig."

"Please say, my man, that I have important business calling me at once away, but thank Major White for his kind invitation," and Hugh Bronx left the room, walked out of the front door, and disappeared down the foliage-bordered gravel walk.

The servant reported the result of his errand, and all regretted that Hugh Bronx had not joined them, as Captain Hurst and Sibyl had always spoken so highly of the mate of the Mermaid, and his daring attempt to recapture the schooner with the barque had been greatly admired.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GIFT.

THE capture of the British brig and recapture of his own schooner, along with the rescue of the unfortunate men who had gone in the barque, made a greater hero than ever of the young sailor, and many were anxious for a look at the dashing privateersman.

Whatever others might feel of the conduct of Hugh Bronx, Lieutenant Manton Moncrief saw that something was wrong, but what he could not discover.

He had noticed that Hugh really seemed to regret being rescued, and had acted in a manner that showed real ingratitude; but not suspecting his love for Sibyl, and not for a moment dreaming that he had caused him a jealous pang, he did not know in what way to account for the strange conduct of the Mermaid's second mate.

After breakfast the young commander was

asked by Sibyl to go up and see her father, as he wished to talk with him, and he followed her to the skipper's room.

"You are a prompt man, Lieutenant Moncrief, and one who carries out just what he undertakes, and I congratulate you," said the skipper.

"And more," he continued. "I really felt as though I was in the action, for Sibyl sat in the window there, telling me every movement as it occurred, and seeing the glare of the burning barque, and hearing the firing and the cries of the combatants, it made the attack most realistic I assure you, though I lay far out of danger here."

"I feel flattered that Miss Hurst should have watched the attack and combat," and the young sailor colored up like a girl with pleasure, to feel that Sibyl had watched the whole affair.

"Now, lieutenant," continued the skipper, "I have a favor to ask of you."

"It is granted, sir, before I know its tenor."

"Well, it is about my brig, or rather Sibyl's, for the craft really belongs to her."

"I wished to have a talk with you about her, Captain Hurst, for she is a most remarkable vessel, though, as I said, would make a better one for speed and stanchness were she altered to a schooner rig."

"It is just that, sir, and she is now undergoing that change, for, as you know, her foremast was shot away and her mizzenmast was weakened."

"Yes, she was roughly handled about the rigging, though her hull was not harmed."

"Barely scratched, sir."

"Now, I drew the model of that vessel and built a small pleasure craft after it, and the result was just as I anticipated—I had a stanch and very speedy boat."

"I tried her in all kinds of weather, and made what improvements I deemed for the best, and then built the brig, intending to present her to the Government as a cruiser."

"But I was asked to use her as a dispatch-boat, on account of her speed and size, and made several runs in her, dropping everything that crossed my path in smooth or rough weather."

"Then I was ordered to bring much-needed arms and stores here, and you know the result."

"My days of service are over, and I shall retire to my farm and live, so I wish the Mermaid to still continue her career, and I know of no one under whom she could win greater fame than you, so I beg of you to accept her personally as a gift from me."

"My dear Captain Hurst, you amaze and overcome me with your generosity; but I had determined to offer you a big price for her, and would like you to sell her to me, for I cannot accept so valuable a craft."

"But, lieutenant, I intended to give her to the Government, as I said, and if I do, some other officer will command her, doubtless."

"But I give her to you personally, and you can fit her out and arm her as you deem best."

"She is now being fitted out, as I said, with two splendid masts, a bowsprit of great length, and spars that will enable her to spread sail enough for a line-of-battleship, and my word for it, she will add to her speed one-third under her new rig."

"You have a chance here to get a fine battery for her, and can readily ship a crew in addition to your own schooner's men, for all will be glad to serve under you, so just set to work whenever you wish, for the Mermaid is your vessel, and you can have Sibyl and myself as passengers back home, if so you will."

"Gladly, sir, I assure you shall the vessel be at your service, and as frankly as you give me the vessel, so I accept it, and when she is ready for sea I shall claim you and Miss Hurst as my guests on your voyage home; but there is one thing I would like to ask you about, Captain Hurst."

"Well, lieutenant?"

"I need a good second officer, my officers and crew having suffered considerably, and one whom I would appoint in that position the Government would confirm, if he is the right sort of a man, and I know of no one better than your young mate, as far as I know him."

"He would be the very man, Lieutenant Moncrief, and I wish you would tender him the position, for it may get a silly notion out of his head to go as the captain of a privateer."

"I shall do so at once, sir, for he is a gentleman and appears to be a good sailor, while he is brave to recklessness, as his attack on that barque showed."

"I will seek him now, and get my crew organized for a cruise in the English brig, while awaiting the completion of the Mermaid's repairs, and which, sir, with the permission of Miss Hurst and yourself, I would like now to call the Sea Siren."

"Certainly, lieutenant, you are at liberty to do as you deem best," answered the skipper, and he saw the young officer depart with a feeling of real pleasure at having been able to return his services in part by giving him the brig; and he held the hope that the offer of a berth of rank in the navy would get Hugh Bronx out of his notion to become a privateersman.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REFUSAL.

HUGH BRONX stood upon the end of a pier, regarding attentively the schooner-of-war Scorpion.

She had been pretty well battered up, by her sea service and late actions, but was a very pretty craft withal, and speedy, if not compared with the Mermaid.

She would make a good privateer, second to few, he thought, and if Lieutenant Moncrief was to have the Mermaid, and had also the English brig, he certainly ought to be willing to part with the schooner, which Hugh had heard was the especial property of the young officer.

"Admiring my craft, Mr. Bronx?" said Manton Moncrief, who had spied Hugh and walked toward him.

Hugh started, his face changed color slightly, and he answered with a sullen air:

"Yes, I was admiring her, for I wish to make you an offer for her, sir."

"Indeed! and I have an offer to make you, and was looking for you when I spied you here."

"What offer can you have to make me, Lieutenant Moncrief?" asked Hugh in surprise.

"You are a sailor, sir, and a good one, and your pluck I have seen tried, while Captain Hurst gives you a most excellent reputation as a gentleman and seaman, so I tender you the acting junior lieutenantancy under me, until the Government commissions you, which will be done, as I send your name in at once, with an account of your gallant endeavor to rescue the Scorpion from the British brig."

"You offer me this position, sir?" asked Hugh with intense surprise.

"Yes, and why not?"

"I cannot accept it, sir, though I thank you," was the cold response.

"And why not, pray?"

"I have other plans, Lieutenant Moncrief, and I was about to seek you also, as I desire to purchase yonder schooner of you."

"For what purpose, may I ask?"

"I wish her as a privateer."

"Better accept my offer, Bronx, for then you are commissioned in the regular navy."

"I prefer to go as a privateer, captain, to a lieutenant in the navy under another's command."

"You know best, sir; but tell me what you wish me to do?"

"Sell me the Scorpion."

"As I have just had a present of that splendid brig, the Mermaid, from her generous owner, I can arrange with you, I think, Mr. Bronx, for the schooner."

"He gives to him what he refuses to sell to me," muttered Hugh, while he said aloud:

"What is your price for her, sir?"

"You are really in earnest?"

"I am, sir."

"Well, I can afford to be generous too, so I'll make you a present of the schooner, with the exception of one of her guns, the bow pivot."

"I do not ask for favors from you, Lieutenant Moncrief."

"I am aware of that, my fine fellow; but I desire to bestow the schooner upon you."

"I will not accept her."

"Permit me to urge it!"

"No, for I will not take her unless you sell her to me."

"What will you give?"

"Ten thousand dollars, sir, on an order on New York, with some cash down, if you wish it, and Captain Hurst will vouch for me."

"I do not fear you, sir; but I will let you have the schooner at your figure, excepting the pivot-gun, which I wish to transfer to the Mermaid, though I will give you a gun from the English brig to replace it."

"I thank you, sir."

"You can give me the order on New York for the money in full, and permit me to say that the schooner already has privateer papers, with the name of her captain in blank, as I retained her papers when I entered the navy, expecting to place one of my officers in command when I captured with her a larger vessel, for she is my own property."

"This will assist me greatly, sir, and I thank you indeed."

"Do not thank me, Bronx, for I get my money, you get your boat, so there is no favor upon either side; but when do you want her?"

"At once, if possible."

"You shall have her, for I will place my wounded on the British brig, and remove what things there are on board that do not go with the craft."

"You will find her a very stanch craft, an easy handler, fast when the Mermaid is not astern of her, and in a condition to readily repair and refit."

"Come, let us go on board and I will give you her papers, and remove the pivot, giving you one in its place, for I shall equip the Mermaid with the splendid battery and small-arms on board the Englishman, and have half a dozen guns to spare, for I shall take as my prize-money the armament of the British craft."

"What will you do with her sir, may I ask?"

"Take a cruise in her for a couple of weeks, until the Mermaid is ready for sea, and then transfer her battery to my new craft, sending the brig, under a prize crew, to New York, where the Government will be very glad to get her, for she is a very able and fine vessel."

"She is indeed, sir, and will be a valuable addition to the United States Navy, doubtless winning for you your captaincy."

"In which case you would go up in rank also, Bronx, if you were with me," said Moncrief with a smile.

"I prefer to take the schooner, sir."

"As you please," and being now alongside of the Scorpion they boarded her and entered the cabin.

The transfer was soon made, and while the pivot-gun on the schooner was being landed to be placed on the Mermaid, when she was ready Hugh Bronx went in search of a crew.

He secured half a dozen of the men, from the Mermaid, and whom he knew well, making two of them his mates, and a third boatswain.

Then he got some two-score seamen about the harbor, some of them having been with him on the barque, in his unfortunate venture which he had hoped would turn out so much to his credit.

The schooner was then hauled inshore and the men set to work to put her in perfect order for sea at the earliest moment, her young captain having already removed his kit from on board the Mermaid.

"That young man works as though he had some deep purpose in view, in getting to sea with that vessel, and I only wish him success," said Manton Moncrief, as he watched the rapid work of the crew of the Scorpion, under the eye of Hugh Bronx.

Until the last glimmer of light did Hugh keep his men at their work, and then he sprang into a boat and was rowed ashore.

Taking his supper at the best inn in the town, he then wended his way toward the elegant home of Major Perry White.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THREAT.

WHEN Hugh Bronx reached the home of Major White, he saw some one seated upon the piazza, enjoying the balmy breeze and the starlit scene out upon the harbor.

A glance showed him that it was the one whom he had come there to see, Sibyl Hurst.

She recognized him, as the light from the open hall door fell upon him, and she said pleasantly:

"Ah, Hugh, I am glad to see you, for I felt really lonesome, for father has dropped off to sleep, since supper, Mrs. White is an invalid you know, and the major is gone to the forts for an hour or so."

"Perhaps other company than mine might be more agreeable," he said coldly, as he took a seat near her.

"If you are going to be cross, doubtless other company would, for you were really disagreeable this morning."

"I did not worry you with my presence."

"True, and perhaps it was better in the humor that you seemed to relish," she said, quietly.

"My presence now may be distasteful, Miss Hurst?"

"Hugh Bronx, what ails you?" she asked, sharply.

"Nothing."

"You are not your good old self at all of late."

"Perhaps you have changed, not I."

"Not one iota."

"You think so?"

"I know so, for I am not one to be friendly to-day and cold to-morrow."

"It is you, Hugh, and I wish you would tell me what is the matter?"

"Suppose I prove to you that you have changed?"

"Do so, if you can."

"Do you not like Lieutenant Moncrief?"

"Immensely."

"And he likes you?"

"I hope so."

"And Surgeon Bennett?"

"Yes, he is a splendid fellow."

"And Captain Bainbridge? you like him too?"

"Very much indeed."

"And those three men love you, Sibyl."

"Why, Hugh, what do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say, Sibyl Hurst, those three men love you, and they intend to win you."

"All three?"

"Well, one of them."

"Which one?"

"I know."

"Pray tell me, sir fortune-teller?"

"Manton Moncrief."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"What reason have you for your saying so?"

"He loves you."

"So you said before."

"You love him."

"Not so fast, Mr. Bronx, for you have no right to accuse me of what your suspicious brain has concocted."

"It is not suspicion, it is the truth, for I have watched you closely, yes, and Manton Moncrief, too."

"You have been well employed."

"You may sneer, but it is so."

"At first I thought that you liked Surgeon Bennett, for I saw that he was deeply interested in you."

"Then I judged that Moncrief had the strongest hold upon your heart, for you seemed to regard him more tenderly."

"Next, when I met you this morning in the presence of Captain Bainbridge I saw that you smiled sweetly upon him."

"You have been very watchful of me, Mr. Bronx, and I would like to know for what purpose?"

"To guard you."

"From what?"

"Danger."

"What danger?"

"You are beset by three dangerous men, for they are all young, handsome, and have fascinations of manners which I do not possess."

"You lead them all to believe that you care for them, and—"

"My dear Hugh, don't be a fool, for a woman is supposed to treat all men alike until she finds one she can love."

"If I smiled on Surgeon Bennett, it was because his skill saved my father's life, and his extreme kindness won my respect and regard, while he is certainly a man of rare culture and intelligence."

"If I was pleasant toward Lieutenant Moncrief, you have but to remember that he saved the *Maid* from the hands of Bianca, the *Buccaneer*, and what your fate would have been, and my father's, you had reason to know."

"He is as brave as a lion, has won fame upon the sea, is very fascinating, and I am proud to call him my friend."

"Now to Captain Bainbridge:"

"He is but a shade less handsome than Lieutenant Moncrief, is a dashing, splendid fellow, and half the girls in the town are desperately in love with him, and so I am glad to number him among my friends, and so I treat all three alike."

"Until you know which one you love," he sneered.

"Yes, and then there will be no difference in my manner, until I know if that one loves me."

"It will be Moncrief."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose we drop this subject, Mr. Bronx?"

"No, for I came to tell you, Sibyl, that I love you, although you already know that."

"I came to tell you that I have loved you since we first met, and to ask you to be my wife."

"Do not be frightened, for I do not ask it now but when I have won fame and riches."

"You know me, Sibyl, and all about me, and I am not as those other men, a stranger to you."

"To-day your father refused to sell me the *Maid*, but gave it to Moncrief; but I was not to be thwarted in my determination, so I bought the *Scorpion* from her commander, the papers are already in my hands, and I have forty good men upon her, getting her ready for sea, and I go as her captain, commanding my own boat as a privateer."

"Hugh Bronx, have you well considered the step you have taken?" asked Sibyl, earnestly.

"I have."

"Though a fine seaman, Hugh, you have had little experience as a commander, and none upon an armed deck."

"I will soon gain it."

"You made a failure of your attack with the barque the other night, in attempting to capture the schooner, while Lieutenant Moncrief went in boats and captured the schooner, the barque and the British brig, showing thereby the skilled commander."

"Curses upon him! I'd have rather died in an English prison than owed my rescue to him," savagely said the young sailor.

"You do not like Lieutenant Moncrief, it is evident; though he saved you from the yard-arm of Bianca's vessel and an English prison."

"No, I hate him," hissed Hugh.

"And how has he ever harmed you, that you should hate him?"

"He loves you, and he is winning your love from me, and I hate any man that comes between you and I, Sibyl Hurst."

"I have a vessel, and I paid for it, by drawing upon my inheritance in New York, and I shall win fame and then come back to make you my wife."

"My dear Hugh, don't be foolish, for you can never make me any such thing."

"What! do you say I can never win you, when I have gained fame at sea?"

"You can never win me, Hugh."

"You refuse me, then?"

"Utterly."

"Why?" he gasped forth.

"Because I do not love you, as you wish my love."

"You are dear to me as a friend, yes as a brother, for I have ever so regarded you; but I

do not love you, Hugh, as you wish, and I never can, never will."

He seemed stunned by her words, for although he had accused her of loving others, he yet had felt when he was in command of a vessel, and on the highway to fame and fortune, that she could not but love him as he wished.

"You send me from you, Sibyl?"

"I would rather that you accepted Lieutenant Moncrief's offer, which father told me of, and showed me that officer's letter to him, saying you had declined, for then I believe you could get experience and work your way up."

"But to go out as a commander yourself, I fear that you but go to your own ruin; but if you win fame, far exceeding that of Moncrief's, you can never be to me more than you now are, a dear good friend, one who has stood in the place of a brother."

"Enough; I thank you for your advice, Miss Hurst, but will not profit by it, as I sail as soon as my vessel is ready, and you will soon hear that the *Sea Scorpion* has not lost her powers on account of a change of commanders, while I wish to say to you, and have you know that I mean what I say, and that is, never shall you be the wife of any other man than Hugh Bronx."

With these words he wheeled on his heel and strode rapidly away, unchecked by a call for him to come back, which he had hoped he would hear from Sibyl's lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEADLY DEED.

THE British brig-of-war, *Brimstone*, was certainly a most valuable prize, for Lieutenant Moncrief, for she was found to be a crack craft, a good sailer, and her armament and equipment were perfect.

Manton Moncrief found that he could equip the *Sea Siren*, as he called the *Maid*, in splendid style, with a large and formidable battery, a complete outfit in small-arms, ammunition, boats and all that was needed, while the brig would yet have half a dozen guns and a good supply of small-arms left.

Her officers and men were taken ashore, as prisoners, to await the return of Moncrief from a cruise, for he could not bear to be idle, while waiting for his new vessel, and then they were to be taken north in their own vessel, the *Sea Siren* acting as convoy.

Finding that he could spare them, and knowing just what the *Scorpion* was wanting in, Manton Moncrief sent several boat-loads of things on board the schooner with his compliments to Hugh Bronx, and the insulting response from the jealous young sailor was that "as he needed the things very much, and could not otherwise procure them in the town, he would take them, paying for them in New York when he reached that port."

The eyes of Manton Moncrief flashed, as the midshipman delivered his message, but he said simply:

"He can do as he pleases, and what he pays can go in as prize-money for the men."

"How I have offended young Captain Bronx I do not know; but he must be careful not to go too far, as he seems inclined, I have observed, to pick a quarrel with me."

The *Brimstone* being in good condition, was gotten out to sea first, Moncrief having enlisted a number of men for the cruise, as his own depleted crew were not sufficient to man her.

Several days after Hugh Bronx went to sea in the schooner, and she went flying down the harbor under full sail, and winning much admiration from all who saw her, for certainly she was a saucy looking craft.

Standing at the window in her father's room Sibyl saw her go by, and waved her kerchief, though it gained no recognition from the morose young captain, though he saw it and turned away.

Finding that he did not call again upon her, Sibyl, not wishing to have him go off in anger, wrote him a note, telling him to come and say good-by to her father and herself, if he had time, but if not, please to accept her heartfelt wishes for his success as a commander, and to be sure and visit them when his cruising brought him near their home.

This note he had not answered, for he was too full of jealous bitterness to do so, and he had put to sea without calling.

Seeing that his captain walked forward, and evidently did not see the waving kerchief, and recognizing the one who held it, Vesey, one of the old crew of the *Maid*, and the first officer of the *Scorpion*, at once sprung to the peak halliards and dipped the flag in response, for, like the rest of the crew from the brig, they loved and respected Sibyl greatly.

Catching sight of his act, Hugh Bronx turned like a madman, and rushing upon the unfortunate officer, dealt him a blow with his pistol-butt that felled him to the deck, while he hissed forth:

"How dare you dip that flag, sir, to a salute I did not notice?"

The officer did not move, but lay prone upon the deck, and Rossmore, the junior officer, and the men looked on with horror at the act of their commander.

"Come, men, bear him to his berth, and have

the surgeon sent to him," called out Hugh Bronx, turning slightly pale, as the form never moved.

Rossmore, a handsome young seaman, stepped forward, bent over the form, and said:

"Officer Vesey is dead, Captain Bronx."

"Quick! send the surgeon here," cried Hugh Bronx, now thoroughly alarmed, and a moment after the surgeon, a doctor lured from his practice in the town with the hope of prize-money, came up from his state-room and bent over the body.

"Dead, sir, he is."

"An attack of heart trouble, I suppose, but a post-mortem will show, if you wish to know the exact cause."

"I know the cause, Surgeon Scott."

"He acted without consulting me, and against my wishes, and I struck him with my pistol-butt, though not intending to kill him."

"Mr. Rossmore, you are now first officer, sir, so have the body sewn up in a hammock for burial at sea," and Hugh Bronx went into his cabin, well knowing that his cruel act had won the hatred of every man on board his vessel.

"I have begun badly, and bad luck may dog me; but I'll not let my crew see that I feel, and shall rule them with an iron hand, for I am to be master of this craft, in the fullest sense of the word, and I'll yet win a name that will make that proud beauty bend her haughty head in my presence."

Once out in deep water, Hugh Bronx ordered the burial of the unfortunate Vesey, and with a brazen effrontery that seemed to thrill his crew, read the service for the dead over him.

Then the schooner was put away on her course up the coast, and a bright lookout was ordered kept for prizes.

The schooner was certainly in good trim, and her crew, which Hugh Bronx had increased to seventy men, were set to work practicing at the guns, and with the small-arms, and the young captain congratulated himself after a week's cruise, that he had a formidable vessel for her size and the number of her seamen.

Several British cruisers had been sighted, but being large sloop-of-war, Hugh Bronx had to try the *Scorpion's* heels in flight, and he was pleased to see that he had a fleet-going craft.

One night, just after dark, and some ten days after sailing, he was becalmed not far from the shore, and between two points of land, some two leagues apart.

When the dawn came, to his dismay, he saw a large sloop-of-war standing in toward him, and bringing a stiff breeze with her.

She was British, beyond all doubt, and she was in a position to cut him off from escaping to sea.

The men realized their danger, as he did, and mutterings went around:

"Now for his punishment for killing Officer Vesey."

CHAPTER XX.

AN ACT OF SUSPICION.

FOR the second time in his life Hugh Bronx felt what it was to have a fearful responsibility resting upon him alone.

He had experienced it the first time when he had taken the barque down to cut out the schooner, and it had not been a pleasant thought, especially when he realized that his undertaking was a failure.

Now, when he was becalmed, for the wind had not yet reached him, and a large British sloop-of-war was coming down upon him, he felt the full danger of the situation, and that seventy pairs of eyes were looking upon him, seventy lives depending upon him.

He saw that he was in a trap, for he had been caught in a large cove, or bay, between two headlands.

He was fully a league from open water, and the sloop coming in, would have him fully under the range of her broadsides, so that he must surrender, go ashore in his boats, or run his vessel upon the beach and destroy her, as soon as the wind reached him, for it would be madness to open fire upon the Englishman.

As the wind reached him he decided upon his course, and that was to run the schooner ashore, set her on fire and escape in his boats with what they could carry with them.

He had just given the order to the helmsman to head for the shore, when the sloop-of-war fired a shot over him.

He had no flag at the peak, and to try and escape a broadside as long as possible, ordered the British ensign run up.

But, as he still held on his course, the sloop fired again, and soon after, luffing sharp, sent a broadside after him.

Several shots tore along his decks, two men fell dead, and others were wounded by splinters.

"Lower away that English flag, and set the American, for she shall die under our own colors, as she will have to go," called out Hugh Bronx, and Rossmore sprung to obey, but stopped short as suddenly a shot came from off the starboard-quarter.

"Sail ho!" shouted the lookout, as the shot

draw his attention to the stranger, which had just shot around the headland on the starboard quarter.

"The brig-of-war!"

"The captured brig, Brimstone!"

Such were the cries that arose at sight of the sail, and Hugh Bronx saw at a glance that the stranger was indeed the Brimstone.

"She has been recaptured!" he cried, and in a low tone he added:

"I hope that Moncrief has been killed."

The gun from the brig had not been loaded with ball, for it seemed to have been fired to attract the attention of the large sloop-of-war, which had not seen the stranger, it was evident.

"What does that mean?" asked Hugh, as he saw the Brimstone signaling rapidly to the sloop-of-war.

"The brig is under the British flag, sir," said Rossmore.

"So I observed, and she has therefore been captured."

"It would seem so, sir, but that makes but another foe for us."

"Yes; but do you read those signals?"

"Yes, sir."

And Rossmore, who was gazing at the brig through the glass, read aloud:

"This is his Majesty's brig-of-war Brimstone, and yonder schooner is our prize, under our own crew."

"Around the headland to the south is our enemy."

"This is remarkable," said Bronx, and then Rossmore continued, reading the signals from the sloop in answer:

"This is his Majesty's sloop-of-war Consort."

"The schooner should have come to at our side."

"Is it the American frigate President, that is beyond headland?"

To this the brig returned answer that the schooner's commander had doubtless mistaken the sloop for an American.

She also answered in the affirmative regarding the vessel beyond the headland being the American frigate President, and added that after speaking the schooner they would follow the sloop and aid in the combat with the large and formidable Yankee craft.

The British sloop at once squared away to round the headland to the south, while the brig headed toward the schooner, which had held on her course during the signaling.

"What do you make of that, Rossmore?"

"I make out one thing, Captain Bronx, and that is that I see Lieutenant Moncrief distinctly on yonder vessel's quarter-deck."

"A prisoner?" eagerly inquired Bronx.

"No, sir, he does not look it, for he appears to be giving orders."

"He is either a prisoner, Rossmore, or a traitor."

"I don't understand it, sir, but there he is, as you can see by turning your glass upon the brig."

"You are right! he has turned traitor; but he is signaling to us."

Rossmore, who was perfectly skilled in signaling at once read:

"Head out to sea and cross my wake, as I follow the sloop."

"What does he mean by that?"

"It looks as though he wanted to give us a chance to run out to sea."

"We can do it, and neither the brig or the sloop can catch us once we cross his wake," eagerly said Bronx.

"It does not look as though the brig wished to do so, for she could head us off readily now, as you see, sir."

The schooner's course was now changed so as to go astern of the brig, which was following in the wake of the sloop-of-war, and about half a league astern.

On her changed course, as the Brimstone was then heading, the Sea Scorpion would pass across her wake about half a mile from her, and once well across, she would have nothing between her and the open sea.

True, did the sloop and brig wish to pursue, the schooner would still be within range of the latter; but on the two vessels could go about and give chase to the Sea Scorpion, in the breeze then blowing, could get a fine start, and if she could run the point of their fire in safety she could rapidly increase her lead, for she was on her best point of sail, and the light wind, a tender breeze, would send her along twice as fast as it did the two larger vessels.

But the brig did not seem to care to put after her, and the sloop held straight on to round the southern headland, to find an enemy there, as signaled from the Brimstone.

"He certainly is not a prisoner," said Bronx, referring to Manton Moncrief, who was seen distinctly, in full uniform, standing upon his quarter-deck, and, as the schooner shot across his vessel's wake, waving to her.

"I do not understand it, sir, for, while he protects us, as he seems to be doing, he certainly is in league with the sloop-of-war and carries the British flag at his peak," answered Rossmore.

"Well, we are safe, for a mile divides us now,

and I care not what he is, though I certainly did not believe him a traitor."

"Nor I, sir; but had we not better round yonder headland as quickly as possible, for we can run a mile nearer to it than can the brig or sloop, were they to chase us, as they draw far more than does the schooner, and it would give us a grand start?"

"Do so, Rossmore," answered Bronx, and the schooner at once was headed so as to round the point of land from behind which, half an hour before, the Brimstone had come into sight.

As she did so it was seen that the sloop-of-war was heading so as to round the southern headland with all speed, while the brig was following in her wake and gaining on her.

That there was some cause of excitement on board the British sloop was soon evident, as Bronx noted, having his glass turned upon her; but what it was he could only guess at, and a moment after the Sea Scorpion went out of sight around the high point of land.

A few moments after the roar of heavy guns reached their ears, and with all sail set, the schooner went flying away to seek safety, having made a most narrow escape through the coming of the brig.

As she sped on the firing in the distance became hotter and hotter, though it seemed to be receding more rapidly than from the schooner's speed would cause it to do, and Bronx said, with a tone of exultation:

"They have run upon the American frigate beyond that headland, and I hope now that Manton Moncrief will be punished for his treachery, for a traitor to our cause he has certainly become, or he would never have been in alliance with the British sloop."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TWO SCHOONERS.

FOUR weeks had passed since the sailing of the Brimstone on her cruise, under her daring captor and commander, and in that time Captain Hurst had improved so much that he was able to sit up for hours each day, enjoying the view from the piazza of his friend's home, where he had been cared for with the greatest kindness.

With the reception of the stores, arms, and ammunition brought by the Mermaid, in her eventful voyage, the struggling Patriot Army had gained new life, and had been able to more than hold their own, where before the scarcity of powder and ball had threatened seriously to cause the forces to fall back or surrender before the advance of the British.

The home of Major White had been the scene of many a gay gathering, for thither were wont to congregate the young officers and beautiful maidens of the town, and Sibyl gained more and more renown, not only as a heroine, but on account of her exquisite loveliness of face and form, added to which was her wit, intelligence and noble heart.

Captain Robert Bainbridge had become her most devoted admirer through all, and many were the sails upon the harbor, and horseback rides the two had together, for the major greatly admired his junior officer, and being a connection of his wife, he was anxious to see him with the fair daughter of his dear friend, Captain Hurst, and rumor had it that Sibyl would surrender her heart before long to the attacks of the gallant soldier.

As for the skipper he calmly looked on, convinced that Robert Bainbridge was a man worthy of any woman's love, but withal convinced that Sibyl was not one to act hastily in anything, and when questioned by the eager major on the subject, he had said:

"No, major, there is nothing between them, I am sure, as Sibyl would certainly tell me."

One afternoon, a month after the sailing of the brig, the major was seated upon the piazza of his home, talking with the skipper, when the keen eye of the latter caught sight of a sail in the offing far away.

"It is a schooner, and she is crowding on all sail for port," said the skipper.

"And do you not hear firing, though it is a long way off?" asked the major.

"I certainly do; and it seems to be coming nearer," answered Captain Hurst, whose pale face flushed with the brave spirit within, as the roar of distant action reached his ears.

Thus the two sat for quite a while, watching the coming vessel, while the firing of heavy guns grew louder and louder.

"Ah! here comes Bainbridge and Sibyl, and they ride as though they had news for us!" cried the major, as, mounted upon spirited horses, the young captain and Sibyl Hurst dashed up the carriage drive to the door.

"Father, do you see that chase?" cried Sibyl, pointing out to sea at the distant schooner.

"Is it a chase, my child?" asked the skipper, as, aided to alight by the soldier, Sibyl ascended the piazza steps with Captain Bainbridge.

"Yes, captain, you do not see the second vessel from here, as she is directly in the wake of the leading one; but from our ride along the shore we saw both, and it has been a long and hot chase," said Robert Bainbridge.

The major at once got his glass, and while

Captain Bainbridge held it for the one-armed skipper, all waited for his report.

After awhile he said:

"Take the glass, Sibyl, and make your report and see if it accords with mine."

The maiden leveled the glass, arranged the focus, and all saw her face flush as she said:

"That schooner is the Sea Scorpion!"

"Such was my decision, my child; but what else?"

"She is leading her pursuer a mile, and gaining slightly, I should judge, though she seems to have suffered, as her sails are torn and her maintopmast shot away."

"Right, my child; but now go to the end of the piazza and see if you can get a view of her pursuer."

Sibyl did so, and when she came back her face was pale and anxious.

"Well, Miss Sibyl, what report have you to make?" asked the major.

"The leading schooner is certainly the Scorpion, and she is straining every nerve to reach port."

"And our young friend Bronx is in command, then?"

"That is his vessel, major."

"He should have the craft in his wake as a prize in tow," said the major.

"He is bringing her after him, major, but not in a way he would like," dryly responded Sibyl.

"That is cruel, Miss Hurst," said Robert Bainbridge, "for the bravest of us must sometimes run."

"True, but poor Hugh went to sea with such determined resolves to do or die, I expected great things of him," was the quiet rejoinder.

But Captain Hurst had observed, more than had the others, that her face wore an anxious look, and he asked:

"Did you make any other discovery, Sibyl?"

"Yes, father."

"What was it?"

"I think I know the craft in chase of Hugh."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir; it is a schooner."

"Then it is a British cruiser of heavier metal than Captain Bronx has," remarked the major.

"I only wish we had a vessel in port that could go out and aid Captain Bronx in the capture of his pursuer," remarked Captain Bainbridge.

"Yes, it is too bad there is nothing here. We must keep some armed craft in harbor for just such an emergency."

"Yes, major; for yonder vessel chasing the Scorpion would be a valuable prize, as it is the schooner known as the Sea Torch, commanded by Bianca the Buccaneer," said Sibyl, in a low, earnest tone.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN OF THE SEA SCORPION.

THE feeling in the heart of Sibyl was that it would be better for her father and herself not to speak of the rest of mankind, if Bianca the Buccaneer was captured and hanged, as he certainly would be hanged if taken.

His being her father's brother and her uncle, had nothing to do with the matter, as he was an outlaw.

With the exception of Hugh Bronx, no one on the brig had heard what had passed between the pirate and her father as to their relationship, though it was evident to the crew that the two had met before, and recognized each other.

With the Sea Torch chasing the Sea Scorpion into port, it was a great pity that she could not in turn be chased and captured, and Captain Bainbridge seemed to fret greatly under the fact.

"If the Mermaid was only ready, I would take command of her with a crew of artillerymen, and go in chase," he said.

"I only wish she was ready," added Sibyl, while her father, who did not wish to see his brother taken, crime-stained though he was, said:

"She is not ready, and will not be for several days, while I am sure the pirate will not remain in this vicinity long."

"No, he is drawing off now, as he hears the forts, evidently suspecting that we have a cruiser in port that will soon be after him," Captain Bainbridge said.

The Sea Scorpion was now quite near, and the naked eye showed that she had been under a hot fire, while the pirate vessel, with the aid of the glass, seemed to be unharmed, comparatively.

"Why, with that very schooner Lieutenant Bainbridge drove the buccaneer away from our brig, when he held it as a prize, and yet the Sea Scorpion is running now."

"What can be the matter with Hugh, I wonder?" and Sibyl wore a troubled look.

No one could answer her question, and all remained watching the coming vessels.

As they drew nearer the forts the pirate shortened sails, and luffing, sent a broadside flying after the Sea Scorpion, which still pressed on under every stitch that would draw.

Then, under easy sail, the Sea Torch stood off to sea once more, her enemy having escaped her.

"Take my boat, Bainbridge, and board the schooner, find out what is the matter, and ask Captain Bronx to come ashore with you," said Major White.

The major's barge, with four negro oarsmen and a coxswain, was kept constantly ready for use, and Captain Bainbridge started toward the boat-house to enter it, when Sibyl called out:

"The schooner is going to lay to, or anchor, Captain Bainbridge."

He waited a moment, saw the schooner luff sharp, and a boat was at once lowered and put off from its side.

"Bronx is coming ashore, major, doubtless to see me, or report to you," said the skipper.

The young captain returned to the piazza, and all watched the coming boat, while the schooner held on once more up to an anchorage near the ship-yards.

"Hugh is in the stern-sheets," said Sibyl, as she took her glass from her eye.

"Then we shall soon know just what has happened," answered the major, while the skipper said:

"Bronx has his glass turned upon the pirate, as though watching her movements; but she is putting out to sea again."

In less than half an hour Hugh Bronx landed at the mansion pier, Captain Bainbridge being there to receive him, and he said pleasantly:

"Welcome back, Captain Bronx, though you seem to have had hot work on board, from the appearance of your vessel."

Hugh Bronx was very pale, and his face was stern; but there was a brightness in his eyes that was not pleasant, as he returned, coldly:

"Yes, I have had hot work, and my cruise, excepting in one respect, has been an unfortunate one."

"I am not mistaken in thinking I saw Captain Hurst upon the piazza of Major White's mansion?"

"No, sir, he is still a guest of the major, along with Miss Hurst."

"Thank you," and Captain Bronx seemed to enjoy his own thoughts better than conversation, as he walked on in silence until they reached the piazza steps.

"Welcome home, Hugh, even if you do bring back with you an old enemy, Bianca 'the Buccaneer,'" said Sibyl, advancing with extended hand.

He took her hand coldly, and she too noticed the evil glitter in his eyes, while he said quickly:

"You recognized the craft astern of me then?"

"Oh, yes, as soon as I caught sight of the vessel chasing you so hotly, I knew her," she said with a half-malicious smile at the shot she gave him, for she was angry at his haughty manner, and was determined he should feel that they knew he was flying for safety.

His face flushed, but he stepped quickly forward and shook hands more cordially with the skipper, saying:

"I am very glad to see you out again, Captain Hurst."

Then he turned to Major White and greeted him in the same constrained manner, a manner that caused him to seem in ill-humor with the world in general.

"Now, Captain Bronx, tell us of the cause of your running from the Buccaneer?" said Sibyl, more and more incensed, that because he was angry with her, all the rest should be made to feel his humor.

Again he flushed, as with shame, while Captain Bainbridge said in his kindly way:

"The captain, doubtless, had some good motive, Miss Hurst, for those pirates carry a very heavy armament, and large crews, while their crews are trained by daily combats."

"Yes, sir, and the strength of the pirate was treble my own, I may say," added Hugh Bronx, seeing that his flight from the buccaneer really demanded an explanation to save him from the charge of cowardice.

"Yes, Hugh had good reasons for running, I am sure, as we will all see when he tells his story."

"Come, Hugh, tell us of your cruise," said the skipper.

"You will find one of my adventures of remarkable interest, I assure you," and he glanced at Sibyl, while into his eyes came that same light, as of wicked triumph.

"If this is to be a report, sir, to me as commandant, I pray you begin," said the major, and his manner was stern, for he had begun to feel that there could be charged against Hugh Bronx the crime of cowardice, and the young privateersman read his thoughts at a glance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAS IT TREACHERY?

HUGH BRONX felt the cutting words of the major, and quickly responded:

"I came into port, Major White, in distress, and hardly with any intention of rendering any report, as owning my own vessel, I have to report only to the Government."

"As you please, sir," was the cold reply.

"But, Major White, I desire to make known to you the result of my cruise, for I intended reporting it all to my old commander here."

"We sailed in good trim, as you doubtless know, but failed to find any English merchantmen, though I had to run from several British cruisers of large size."

"One night the Sea Scorpion was becalmed upon the coast, in a sheltered cove, protected by two headlands."

"The dawn brought a breeze from the sea, and with it a large British sloop-of-war, the Consort."

"She came with the wind, and I having not a cat'spaw to fill my sails, was caught in this cove, and had either of two alternatives, to run my schooner ashore with the wind as I got it, set her on fire and take to my boats, or to surrender."

"I chose the former, and set sail for the shore under the fire of the sloop, which damaged me a little and killed and wounded several of my crew."

"Hearing a shot from another quarter, to my surprise, I beheld the Brimstone, Captain Moncrief's vessel."

"She had fired a blank cartridge to attract the sloop's attention, and then began signaling to her."

"She had flying, as I said, the English flag."

"This is strange, sir," said the major.

"So I thought, sir, and my first officer, Rossmore, read the signals, which were, in effect, that my schooner was his prize, under a prize crew, but that the American frigate President lay beyond the other headland, and he would aid the sloop in an attack upon her."

"Remarkable!" said the major.

"I cannot understand this," the skipper remarked, while Captain Bainbridge said:

"There must be some mistake, Captain Bronx."

"There is a mistake," quietly responded Sibyl.

"There is no mistake, for all occurred as I have stated, and the brig followed in the wake of the sloop."

"And you?"

"The brig signaled to me to head out across its wake toward the open sea, and I did so."

"With what result?"

"With the result, Major White, that I passed out across the wake of the Brimstone, half a mile away from her, and three times that distance from the British sloop, and I at once ran for it."

"Did not the sloop observe this?"

"Yes, sir, there seemed to be some excitement on board, but as I drew less water than either vessel, I ran close in to the headland to the north and rounding it, threw both vessels out of sight, gaining thereby over a league start, as they would have to go about, and, standing far out to round the point, would be unable to catch me, especially as the light ten-knot breeze favored me more than it did them."

"And you thus lost sight of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the brig went on with the sloop?"

"Yes, sir, to attack the American man-of-war President, for, soon after we rounded the northern headland, we heard very heavy firing around in the cove, it seemed, and we decided that the two British vessels had attacked the American frigate."

"What two British vessels, Hugh?" asked Sibyl.

"The sloop-of-war, and the brig."

"Do you mean to say that Lieutenant Moncrief joined forces against the President, with a British vessel?"

"Yes, that is just what he did."

"That would make him a traitor," the major remarked.

"And a traitor he is, for he came around the headland under the English flag, signaled the Englishman that I was his prize, and ordered me to follow in his wake as such, after which he signaled the sloop that he would go with him and attack the President."

"This was treacherous," and more, he was treacherous to the English commander as well, as I was not his prize, and he sought to gain me by falsehood."

The gentlemen present seemed fairly stunned by this charge against Moncrief, but Sibyl smiled serenely and said:

"Let us not judge until we hear Lieutenant Moncrief's story, for he can doubtless offer some good reason for what appears to be treachery."

"He can offer no reason to clear his name of treachery," hotly responded Hugh Bronx.

"And why did you not go and see if the American pirate, with two formidable foes to fight, did not need your aid?" asked Sibyl.

"My vessel is a privateer, not a cruiser," was the sullen reply.

"A vessel that is commissioned by Government as a privateer, is supposed to fight for her flag if need be, and if not, if merely a runner down of defenseless merchantmen, Hugh Bronx, she degenerates into what might be called a pirate."

Hugh Bronx winced under the galling words of the maiden, while the skipper said:

"Yes, Hugh, I should have thought, after you gained open water, with no fear of being hemmed in, you would have gone to have seen the result of the combat; but did the firing seem severe?"

"Very."

"And how long did it last?"

"We heard it for an hour or more."

"Broadside?"

"Yes, sir, frequently."

"Major White, is the President now on this coast?"

"Yes, Hurst, and about where Captain Bronx says she was, I suppose."

"Had she captured the sloop or brig, she would have brought them to this port?"

"Without doubt; but when was this, Captain Bronx?"

"About ten days after I left port."

"Then I sincerely hope the President was not taken by that powerful sloop-of-war, Consort, and the brig, as you led us to believe, Moncrief joined the Englishman in the attack."

"If not, why the heavy firing?"

This was a question hard to answer, and Sibyl answered it by asking another, Yankee-like:

"But what of your flight from the pirate, Hugh?"

Hugh Bronx shot an angry glance at her.

He had expected to fairly wither her with the report of Moncrief's treachery, and had not done so, and she seemed more anxious to learn of his having been run into port by the pirate, than to discuss the fact that the man he accused her of loving was a traitor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SECRET OUT.

THAT all were staggered by what was told them by Hugh Bronx, regarding the suspicious conduct of Lieutenant Moncrief, there was no doubt, and even Sibyl felt anxious, though she did not show any anxiety.

The way it looked was that Moncrief had seen that the sloop-of-war was about to run the schooner to destruction, and determined to save her as his prize, and so signaled the British vessel, expecting the Scorpion to cross his wake and then follow on, until he was able to take possession of her.

The Brimstone had then gone after the sloop-of-war, to join in the attack on the American frigate President, while the Scorpion had made her escape, and afterward heard the firing as the two vessels engaged with their enemy.

So it looked to all who heard the story of Hugh Bronx, and it seemed but natural that Moncrief should be a traitor.

In response to the question of Sibyl, as to his flight, Hugh said:

"I was not a vessel-of-war, but a privateer, to prey upon the shipping of England, and so I secured my escape, leaving the sea warriors to fight it out."

"And how about your flight from the pirate?" persisted Sibyl.

The face of the young sailor flushed, and he seemed annoyed; but he replied, in an indifferent way:

"That was one of the accidents of war, the pirate being the stronger."

"Yet Lieutenant Moncrief, with the vessel you command and a smaller crew, put that same pirate to flight, when he held the Mermaid as a prize," urged Sibyl, to the evident enjoyment of the major, while Captain Bainbridge, in the goodness of his heart, seemed to feel for the young sailor.

As for the skipper he looked pained, for somehow he felt that Hugh Bronx had not met his expectations of him.

In no more inquisitive hands than Sibyl's, could Hugh Bronx have fallen, for she seemed to appreciate, what the others did not, that he sought to throw odium upon Manton Moncrief, and she was determined to punish him for it, as far as lay in her power.

With an angry toss of his head, the young sailor replied:

"Circumstances alter cases, Miss Hurst, as you doubtless know, as I will prove, when I tell you that I lost several men, killed and wounded, under the fire of the sloop."

"Then, too, two days after we were caught in a hurricane and seven of my best men were washed overboard, while several others, with broken arms and legs, were unfit for duty."

"Sighting a prize, I gave chase to her, two days ago, and she proving a good sailer, I gained very slowly."

"I kept up a running fire, from the pivot-gun which Lieutenant Moncrief had given me, in place of the splendid piece he removed for the Mermaid, and which was far inferior to the one he took."

"The prize also opened heavily on me, and thus was our chase kept up, both of us suffering, I in my crew, and as I afterwards learned, the merchantman in her rig and hull."

"This morning at dawn I was near enough to give her a broadside, and it brought her to, when I went down to board, but was met by a hot fire which further cut down my men."

"I boarded, however, and, after a hot fight the prize was taken, proving to be a richly-freighted vessel with supplies for the British fleet, and a number of officers on board coming out to join their regiments in America, and this accounted for her determined resistance, for

they had gotten out of the hold a fine cannon and mounted it astern, and this piece it was that had done my crew so much damage.

"I had hardly learned what a splendid prize I had, and looked after the number of my prisoners, when a sail was sighted.

"She had come down upon us, enveloped in the morning mist, and was near at hand when seen.

"At a glance I knew her as the Sea Torch, under the command of—well, you know who, Miss Hurst," and Hugh Bronx gave a wicked smile, feeling that he had the power to make Sibyl and her father fear him.

But the maiden instantly said, and in the most indifferent manner:

"Yes, under the command of my uncle, Bianca the Buccaneer."

Then turning to the surprised major, and Captain Bainbridge, she continued:

"There is one thing I must tell you and Captain Bainbridge, Major White, and that is the fact that my father had a brother who went wholly to the bad, and whom he recognized in Bianca the Buccaneer, when his vessel the Sea Torch captured the Mermaid.

"We did not speak of this before, as it was a painful subject, but as Captain Bronx has referred to it, it is best that you know the facts."

"We can only be responsible for our own actions, not those of others, Sibyl," said Major White promptly, while Captain Bainbridge responded:

"That Captain Hurst should be the brother of Bianca the Buccaneer, is his misfortune, not his fault."

"I so feel it, gentlemen, though I bewail deeply the fact that my poor brother has become what he has."

"No one need know the circumstance, for my lips are sealed, as are yours, Bainbridge, I am sure, while Captain Bronx being your devoted friend, Hurst, will certainly keep silent upon a matter so painful to you and your lovely daughter," and Major White spoke in a manner that conveyed more than did his words, while he riveted his eyes upon Hugh Bronx.

The young privateersman was astounded.

He had expected to humiliate Sibyl, and she had frankly told the secret and thus foiled him.

Having thus gained the advantage, and seen how the major and Bainbridge took it, Sibyl said:

"Now, Captain Bronx, tell us more fully about your flight before the ire of my piratical uncle, please."

Hugh Bronx bit his lips with vexation, then said:

"I saw that I must fight the pirate, though my crew were greatly depleted, and ordered the English prisoners below decks, in their vessel, and my men back on board the Scorpion to quarters.

"But, as I have said, the prize had a number of officers on board, and they at once saw their chance, for they mutinied against my control, and refused to leave the decks, while I was forced to retreat to my vessel to defend her, as the red-handed pirate was coming down savagely upon us.

"He opened fire upon me, and the result, a broadside, was terrible, for he strewed my decks with dead and wounded.

"Then he wore around and gave the British barque a broadside, heading down to board her.

"I saw that my men were demoralized, and I had but one course to pursue, and that was to fly, as with but a score of men fit for work I was no match for the pirate.

"So I ordered sail crowded upon the schooner and we gained a good lead while the pirate was capturing the barque, which it did by boarding.

"Having placed a prize crew on board the barque, the pirate set sail in chase of me, opening at long range, though without damage, except from an occasional shot.

"Thus the flight continued, the pirate gradually gaining upon me, until his shots began to tell, and I trying all in my power to reach this port.

"The result you know," and he ended the recital abruptly.

"Barques seem to be fatal to your success, Hugh," calmly observed Sibyl.

"I am sure, Miss Hurst, Captain Bronx acted for the best, to save his vessel, for those pirates are all heavily armed and manned," said Robert Bainbridge, really pitying the young sailor under the battery of Sibyl's sarcasm, more than he had under the fire of the buccaner.

Seeing that he had no sympathy from Sibyl, Hugh Bronx arose, and refusing the invitation of the major to stay to tea, took his departure, he said to quickly repair damages, ship additional men and go in search of the Sea Torch.

"Better stick to running down merchant vessels, Hugh, for pirate-hunting is dangerous work and Uncle Bianca is a desperate man," called out Sibyl with provoking sarcasm, which the young sailor could not but feel; but she meant to make him feel.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR ARRIVAL.

AFTER the departure of Hugh Bronx, there

was a silence of some moments between those he left upon the piazza.

He seemed to have left an unpleasant sensation upon all.

At last Major White said:

"I cannot understand this story about Moncrief."

"He will come round all right, sir, I am sure, for treachery can never be charged against Manton Moncrief my friends," Robert Bainbridge remarked.

"He has certainly overstayed his time, for he hardly expected to be gone half the time; but his explanation, if he returns, will doubtless put a different light upon his conduct, from what our young friend Bronx gives it," the major said.

As for the skipper and Sibyl they both remained silent, the latter glancing far out toward the sea.

Suddenly from her lips broke, in real maintop style:

"Sail ho!"

All eyes were turned seaward, where, coming up the coast had suddenly shot into view the white sails of a vessel.

It had been noticed, that when the pirate schooner had started out to sea she had at first headed down the coast, and then changing her course quickly, had gone directly in an opposite direction, soon disappearing from the view of those seated upon the piazza.

Now, from the direction just opposite to that which the pirate had taken, the sail appeared in sight.

Seizing her glass Sibyl leveled it upon the stranger, and the cry that escaped her lips proved that she had made some important discovery.

"Well, my child?" queried the skipper.

"It is the brig."

"What brig?"

"The Brimstone!"

All were upon their feet in an instant, and the several glasses of the mansion were quickly leveled.

"Yes, it is the brig, and she is under a tremendous pressure of canvas," said the skipper.

"Can anything be in chase?" asked the major.

"Is she not in chase of the pirate?" Sibyl said.

"You are right, my child, as you 'most always are, for the—the—well, I might as well call him such, as he is nothing more, the pirate, started down the coast, and then went about, crowding on sail as he did so, and without doubt saw the brig, which caused him to do so," said the skipper.

"Yes, she holds on by, so is not coming into the harbor," said the major, who well knew the course a vessel had to take to run up to the town, though he was no sailor.

All eyes were now upon the brig, which, crowded from truck to deck with canvas, was going with all speed in chase of the pirate schooner, it was very evident.

Hardly had she glided by out of sight, in the direction the Sea Torch had taken, when the skipper said:

"There is a bank of fog coming in from seaward, so I think the Brimstone will have to give up her chase, as she will not dare hold on near the coast in a mist.

"But will Moncrief dare enter this port?" the major asked.

"Why not, major?"

"Well, Miss Sibyl, if he should be the traitor Bronx reports him, it will be a very bad place for him to come to."

"He will come to prove that Bronx is mistaken," was the ready reply.

"I hope so," Captain Bainbridge said, and he added fervently:

"And I believe so."

"Sail ho!"

Again the cry broke from the lips of Sibyl, and all eyes turned upon a large schooner, evidently armed, that came bounding along into view, following in the wake of the brig.

"Is that the brig flying from her, after all?" asked Major White.

"It does appear so," the young soldier captain said.

"Is the schooner not rather one of our vessels-of-war, trying to get into port before the fog strikes them?" was Sibyl's inquiry.

"We will soon know, my child," and then quickly following the skipper's words came in his ringing voice:

"Sail ho!"

"Yes, I see her."

"She is dead in the wake of the schooner, and a barque," cried Sibyl.

"They carry the American flag, both the barque and the schooner," remarked Captain Bainbridge, who was regarding both attentively.

"And did any one observe the flag at the peak of the brig?" asked the major.

No one had, and all wondered at it.

The schooner was now seen to round up toward the town, and that was a proof that it was not an Englishman under American colors.

Soon after the barque did the same, still hold-

ing in the schooner's wake, and in a moment more Sibyl cried:

"There comes the brig!"

It was true, the Brimstone now came into view, heading for the harbor entrance, and in a short while her prow was pointed toward the town.

Behind her rolled a great bank of fog, and she seemed anxious to keep ahead of it and gain an anchorage.

Overhauling the barque she passed her in grand style, and was abreast of the schooner when the forts were reached.

Then the fog-bank proved the victor, and the three vessels were shut out from the view of those on the piazza of the White mansion.

As the mist swept up toward the town, the party heard the plunge of the anchors, signifying that the brig, the barque and the schooner had anchored, and then all entered the mansion to escape the damp and chill air, as night was now coming on.

A blazing wood fire upon the spacious hearth of the library made all cheerful within, and Mrs. White, who sat there, was joined by her husband and guests.

Hardly had they become seated when a quick, firm step was heard on the piazza, and the brass knocker clanged loudly.

The major stepped to the door, and a moment after returned to the library accompanied by Manton Moncrief.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN EXPLANATION.

THERE was certainly no look upon the handsome face of Manton Moncrief, as he entered the library of Major White's mansion, that would lead one to believe that he had really committed a treacherous act toward his country.

He looked a trifle haggard, as though he had seen hard service, and wore his left arm in a sling, as though wounded.

He had been warmly greeted at the door by the major, who had ushered him at once into the library, and there Mrs. White and the others all gave him a kindly greeting.

"We saw your vessel pass the harbor, evidently in chase of the schooner that had gone on up the coast, so hardly expected to see you back so soon; but you are welcome, Moncrief, and we are most anxious to hear the story of your cruise," said the major.

"I will give it to you with pleasure, but first tell me if you have seen or heard aught of the Sea Scorpion?"

"Yes; she came into port a few hours before you."

"I am glad of that, and I hope he had a successful cruise; but you ask me of my voyage, and I may say that I ran by the harbor entrance in chase of a vessel I recognized as the Sea Torch, under that noted pirate, Bianca.

"I saw that I was to be caught in a fog-bank, and, as I saw the schooner disappear in it, I recognized the uselessness of holding on, so put back to port and followed my prizes in."

"Your prizes?" asked the major.

"Yes; for I captured the schooner several days ago off the Bermudas, and placed a prize crew on board, while the barque I caught today."

"Was the schooner an English vessel-of-war, lieutenant?" asked Major White.

"No, a British privateer though, and a splendid prize, while the barque was a swift sailer, sent out as was your vessel, Captain Hurst, loaded with supplies.

"She was on her way to find the British squadron, with arms, ammunition and stores of all kinds for the English troops and the fleet, and is as valuable a capture as we could wish, while she has a colonel of infantry and a score of junior officers on board, coming to join their commands here.

"The colonel told me that they had been chased by an American schooner-of-war which had just captured them, when a second schooner came up and drove the American off."

"This second one proved to be a pirate, in fact the Sea Torch, and it threw a prize crew on board and then went in chase of the American, which put off in flight from some strange reason."

"It was several hours after that I came up with the barque, running upon her almost, in a fog-bank, and made her my prize, and the pirate crew who had her in charge, fifteen in number, I have in irons in the hold of the Brimstone."

"So you made two valuable captures, lieutenant, on your cruise?"

"Yes, Major White, for the privateer schooner is a good vessel, and like the Brimstone, will be a valuable addition to our navy, while the barque, put in good trim, will also make a good cruiser, as she is a fleet craft."

"Have you any idea, Lieutenant Moncrief, of what American schooner it was that captured the barque, and then had to run from the pirate?" asked Sibyl quietly.

"I tried to get a correct description of the vessel, or her name, but could not, but I suppose it was some privateer cut down in its crew."

whose captain knew he was unable to cope with the pirate, and took the wiser course and fled."

"Do you not know what schooner it was, Lieutenant Moncrief?"

"Miss Hurst, you seem to imply that I do know."

"I am sure that you do, but will not say."

"Why should I?"

"You do not wish to say aught to reflect upon a brother sailor?"

"Well, to be frank, I believe I do know the vessel, but I prefer not to mention her name until the captain has made his report."

"And that he has done, for he says that he was not strong enough to fight the pirate."

"Then you know who it was, Miss Hurst?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Moncrief, it was Captain Hugh Bronx."

"It was then, as I supposed, that his crew had been depleted in action, or from other causes, and he dared not venture a combat with the famous corsair, and I think he was wise, though if he had known the value of the cargo of the barque, he would have made a stand to save her for our forces."

"Do you not think, Lieutenant Moncrief, that he might have told the crew and officers on board the barque that their foe was a pirate, and offered them their liberty if they would join in with him and capture the pirate?"

"You put telling questions, Miss Hurst," said Moncrief, with a smile.

"Do you not think by such an alliance the pirate might have been taken, or at least beaten off?" persisted Sibyl.

"Both might have been possible, Miss Hurst, but it is hard to say."

"You are generous, lieutenant, more generous, I may say by far than Captain Bronx would be to you."

"I hope you misjudge him, Miss Hurst."

"If you are willing to explain the circumstances of your meeting with Captain Bronx at sea, we will all be able to judge."

"He told you then of our meeting?"

"Yes, sir, and we would like to hear your story," and Sibyl smiled, while the others looked on in silence, with intense interest at the manner in which the maiden was working up to the denouement of how Moncrief could refute the charge of treachery.

As for Mrs. White, who knew not the circumstances, she wondered that her husband and Captain Bainbridge were seeming to encourage the questioning by Sibyl; but they were glad not to have to ask the young commander for an explanation.

"A story loses its merit by being retold, Miss Hurst, and Bronx has doubtless told you all as he saw it."

"Permit me to urge the story from your lips also, Lieutenant Moncrief," said the skipper, coming to Sibyl's aid.

"Certainly, for there is something to tell after all which Captain Bronx did not know of."

"The fact is, when I rounded the headland, where the Sea Scorpion had been becalmed over night, I not being very far distant from her, I sighted first the British sloop-of-war."

"Then the schooner came in sight, further inshore, and seeing that we were not seen by either, I ran up the king's flag and fired a gun to attract attention."

"I recognized the sloop-of-war as one that had often chased me in the little schooner, and seeing the great danger of the latter and that Bronx evidently meant to beach her, I fired the shot, intending by a trick to save her."

"This trick was to be the British private signals I had found on board the Brimstone, and thereby rescue the schooner from her peril."

"So I signaled the sloop that I was the British brig-of-war Brimstone, and that the schooner was my prize, the young commander evidently not knowing the sloop as a friend, and therefore running from her."

"My device worked to a charm, and to get the sloop out of the way, so that the schooner could escape to sea, I made the signals tell another story, in effect that there was, beyond the southern headland, the American frigate President, and that together, the three of us might capture him."

"The sloop signaled that she would go on to the attack, and for me and the schooner to come on after her and join in the combat."

"I then signaled to the schooner to cross my wake to windward, and was glad to see that Bronx understood me, and at once doing so, headed close inshore around the northern headland and escaped."

"Had the schooner been a trifle stronger, I would have been glad to have Captain Bronx join me in an attack upon the sloop, for we might have been successful; but, as it was, perhaps it was better that he should not risk his vessel, she not being a regular cruiser, and thus made good his escape."

"Such is my story of the schooner's escape, Miss Hurst."

"And your escape, Lieutenant Moncrief, you do not refer to?"

"Ah, yes," and the young sailor smiled; but all saw that there was something back of the smile that he cared not to make known.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE.

SIBYL was persistent, that all present saw and Manton Moncrief felt.

She was not disagreeable so, but in her pleasant way showed that she was anxious to know all that there was to tell.

She had discovered a phase in Hugh Bronx's nature which she had not before suspected.

That he loved her she felt, and yet he had no right to wish to crush all opposition, to put his foot, so to speak, upon the neck of all rivals.

He had shown himself a dangerous man, and she wished to know just what to expect from him.

He had threatened her, and she was not one to idly live under a threat.

She loved his dear old mother very much, and she had loved Hugh Bronx as though he had been her brother, while, not wanting others to show her her mistake, she might have one day become his wife, believing that she loved him as he wished her to do.

But, meeting Lieutenant Moncrief and Captain Bainbridge both, had proven to her that she could never love Hugh Bronx as a wife should love her husband.

Frankly she had told him so, and she had seen the evil nature that was his.

She knew that he owed his life to Manton Moncrief when rescued from Bianca, the Buccaneer, and again, that he had tried to rescue Manton Moncrief simply to repay the debt, and had been taken prisoner and again saved by the man he sought to save.

This had maddened Hugh Bronx, Sibyl well knew, and made him hateful in the extreme, though he had been given the schooner by Lieutenant Moncrief at one-half her value, though he would not acknowledge the favor.

Going to sea in the Sea Scorpion as her commander, his career would have been quickly over but for the coming of the Brimstone upon the scene, and when saved again by Manton Moncrief, Sibyl saw that Hugh Bronx had returned, and with seeming pleasure charged him with being a traitor.

His whole conduct had so incensed her that she was determined to get at the bottom facts and let Hugh Bronx know that she understood him as he really was.

Thus it was that she urged so persistently for Manton Moncrief to tell her all that had happened, while her father and the others, from various motives, were anxious to have the truth, as the charge against the young officer of treachery had left him in a very painful light to other eyes.

"Yes, Moncrief, with Miss Sibyl, I would like to know how you escaped from the sloop—in fact, all of us would," said Major White.

"It is soon told, sir, for the sloop saw the flight of the schooner, and at once signaled to know the cause."

"I was too near her dangerous broadsides to attempt to run also, so gave signal back that she had gone around the headland to pick up two boats' crews which had been on a raid for fresh provisions."

"You see, Miss Hurst, one who tells a falsehood must cover it with another, and I had to make the signals tell untruth after untruth—but it was in a good cause, as you know."

"This answer seemed to satisfy the sloop's commander, and he held on around the headland, I still following in his wake; but he signaled to me to have the schooner come to our aid as soon as possible, and I sent such signals to Captain Bronx, feeling that he would understand them; but he returned no answer."

The sloop now began to round the headland, and I had all ready to put about and run for it as soon as she should disappear from view."

"In the wind that was blowing I had gained on the sloop, and I felt that I could outrun her, once I could get out of near range, so as not to be crippled by a broadside."

"The schooner had already disappeared around the northern headland, and twenty minutes after the sloop went out of sight."

"Hardly had her stern disappeared, when I gave the order to go about and head seaward, though on a course that would not bring me in view of the sloop again, or at least until I had gained quite a start."

"It seems, after rounding the headland, until she could get a fair view of the entire shore for miles, the captain of the British vessel did not discover my American frigate, and, having waited a reasonable time for me to appear, and I not doing so, he became suspicious."

"Such is my idea, for he put about, and when he rounded the headland again he was ready for action."

"He saw the Brimstone making all haste to sea, and the schooner of course was not in sight."

"He saw too what showed him that he had been deceived by a Yankee, the flag of our navy flying at my peak, and he luffed quickly and let me have a broadside."

"Fortunately it did no damage, and to gain a little more time, for I was increasing my lead steadily, I signaled him that I wished to speak with him."

"He asked what I wanted, and I sent the signal up that the schooner was the American cruiser Scorpion, which the British brig-of-war Brimstone had captured, and carried to an anchorage off Charleston."

"That I had been the schooner's commander, had escaped and recapturing the Scorpion had also captured the Brimstone, and, to allow the Scorpion to escape him had signaled as I had."

"All this took some fifteen minutes, and he patiently heard all, and then gave me another broadside, which did but little damage however."

"I had gained a quarter of a mile in distance, by my signaling, and so had not so much fear of his fearful broadsides, and ran for all the brig was worth, firing upon him from my stern guns, and doing him some injury, as I could see."

"After a chase until nightfall, when I was out of range, the sloop gave it up and I went on my way; but what became of the schooner I did not know, and was glad to hear from you that Captain Bronx had arrived in port in safety."

Such was Manton Moncrief's story, and it drove from the minds of his hearers, who had listened to Hugh Bronx's charge, all idea of treachery.

He saw that there was some cause for the looks passing between the party, but said nothing that exhibited any curiosity to know what they meant, and soon after remarked:

"With the Scorpion in port, the schooner I have just captured, and the Brimstone, I think we have a splendid chance of capturing the British sloop-of-war, should she appear off this port, as I feel assured that she will, in hope of finding either the brig or the schooner, and I shall make the attempt."

"There is another vessel to aid you, lieutenant," said the skipper.

"Ah, is there another American cruiser in port?" he asked.

"There is one soon to be made one—your Sea Siren."

"Ah, Captain Hurst, you remind me that your beautiful vessel is ready for sea."

"Yes, and a beauty she is, while it will be a good chance to try her speed with the Sea Scorpion, so that we can judge if her change of rig has improved her."

"I am sure that it has, Captain Hurst; but, as you say, with the Sea Siren, armed from the battery on the brig, to aid us, I would not fear to attack a line-of-battle ship close inshore, where we could have a port to run into if worsted."

Just then the knocker resounded again, and the negro butler ushered into the room Hugh Bronx, who had learned of the arrival in port of the Brimstone, and returned quickly to the mansion of Major White for a purpose the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONFRONTED.

THE entrance of Hugh Bronx was a surprise, and all who saw his pale face felt that his coming was for a purpose.

The major arose and greeted him, presented his wife, and then said:

"The rest of my guests you know, Captain Bronx."

"Pardon me, Major White, but there is one here whom I am sorry to hear you call your guest, as I came to ask you for a force to go and seize his vessel, having learned he had entered the harbor."

"I need not say that I refer to Lieutenant Moncrief."

And the voice of Hugh Bronx fairly trembled with the rage that he in vain tried to suppress.

"And why seize my vessel, Captain Bronx?" asked Manton Moncrief, with a pleasant smile.

"I would seize her, sir, as the vessel of a treacherous American, and her commander as a traitor!" was the reply.

Moncrief's face became serious, and he turned to Major White, who said quickly:

"Captain Bronx, my house is no place, sir, to make charges against a brother officer, charges which we now know cannot be sustained, as Lieutenant Moncrief has fully explained all circumstances which to you, and through your story to us, seemed suspicious."

"Can he explain away his having engaged an American frigate with a British sloop-of-war as an ally?"

"My dear Bronx, you are not well, surely, or you would know that I am no man to accuse as you do," and Manton Moncrief smiled, but it was a dangerous smile.

"Hugh Bronx, you are no longer under my command, sir, but through my friendship for you, you were introduced to this mansion, and I command you to at once depart, before you bring more disgrace upon yourself," and Captain Hurst arose and confronted the young privateersman.

"Is it a disgrace to accuse a man of treachery?" he asked sternly.

"It is to do so in the manner that you do, and to accuse one who is above suspicion, sir," retorted the skipper.

"Then, Major White, do you decline to give

me a force to seize Lieutenant Moncrief and his vessel?"

"I most assuredly do, sir," was the stern response.

"Pardon me, major, but as I seem to be a bone of contention, I will take my departure, and if Captain Bronx would find me he has but to come on board my brig, the Brimstone; but if he had shown half the courage at sea, when I risked my vessel and crew to save him and his schooner, as he does in making charges of treachery against me here in the presence of ladies, he would not have had to run into this port to hide from a pirate, but brought a valuable prize with him."

The voice of Manton Moncrief was clear, and every word told upon his hearers, while, bowing his way toward the door as he concluded, he glanced at Hugh Bronx in a way that that personage could not fail to comprehend.

"Pardon me, Lieutenant Moncrief, but you are to remain to supper with us to-night, and when Captain Bronx wishes to see you, he knows where to find you," and Major White stepped forward and laid his hand gently upon the shoulder of the naval officer, while he bowed to the privateersman in a way that showed he had dismissed him.

"And you refuse to give me a force to arrest that man upon my charge against him, Major White," excitedly said Hugh Bronx.

"Most certainly I do, sir."

"I denounce him as a traitor to his flag and country."

"Seek Lieutenant Moncrief, sir, as he says, on board his vessel, and not in the presence of ladies, and then accuse him," said the major, quietly.

"That means that I am not believed?"

"As you please, sir."

"I bid you good-night, Major White," and with a fierce glance at Sibyl, Hugh Bronx bowed low and left the room.

"Now, major, permit me to go," said Moncrief, in his pleasant way.

"Sibyl, kindly take charge of Lieutenant Moncrief, and show him the way to the supper-room, for Ben announced it as our irate young friend arrived."

"Your arm, please, lieutenant," and Manton Moncrief was led captive away by Sibyl, who was glad that he did not follow Hugh Bronx from the house, as the young privateersman was mad with jealousy, and would not have hesitated to attack the naval officer, she well knew.

Around the cheerful supper-table all discussed the strange conduct of Hugh Bronx, and as Sibyl kept silent as to his motive, no conclusion could be arrived at other than that his brain was turned by his suddenly becoming captain of an armed vessel.

Soon after supper Manton Moncrief arose and took his leave, the skipper telling him that the Sea Siren, as the Mermaid was to be called, was at his disposal and ready for sailing at any time.

"I trust to have the pleasure of seeing you soon again, Miss Hurst, and shall expect my friends here to all dine with me on board the Sea Siren, when she is an armed vessel," said Moncrief, as he grasped the hand of Sibyl in parting, and then left the room.

"Will you not go after him, for somehow I dread trouble," said Sibyl, gliding up to the side of Captain Bainbridge, who had been detained by the major, as he wished to give him some personal instructions for work on the morrow.

"Gladly, for I intended doing so, perhaps from a feeling that harm might follow."

"Will you please say to the major that I will call early in the morning for his instructions, Miss Hurst?" and the young soldier hastily departed from the mansion.

Quickly wending his way down the gravel walk to the road, which led to the town, and also to the landing of the mansion, Robert Bainbridge heard voices ahead of him.

The mist was very heavy, and he could hardly see ten feet ahead of him, but, as he advanced he heard the words:

"Our orders, sir, are to take you alive if we can, but to kill you if you resist, and we have your breast covered with our weapons."

Instantly the meaning of the words flashed through the mind of Robert Bainbridge, and he felt that Moncrief had been set upon by a party who sought to capture or kill him.

He knew that the young sailor had come ashore in his undress uniform, and unarmed, while his left arm was in a sling, from a wound received in the combat of the brig with the British schooner.

Caught unawares, and covered by weapons in the hands of desperadoes, Captain Bainbridge knew that Manton Moncrief was at the mercy of his foes.

At once he decided to act, and utterly fearless, he did not count the odds that might be against him.

Drawing his sword in one hand, and a pistol in the other, he sprang forward and confronted the astonished party, while his blade struck up the leveled pistols of three men who faced Manton Moncrief, who stood two paces before them.

"Villains! down with your arms, or my men fire on you!" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

One man had been wounded severely by the severe upward cut of the sword, and his pistol had already fallen from his hand, while the other two, believing themselves covered by muskets, quickly dropped their weapons.

"Down on your faces, all of you!" cried the soldier, and the men obeyed quickly.

"Captain Bainbridge, you have rendered me good service, sir, so tell me how I can aid you now," said Moncrief, coolly.

"Let us see that these rascals are secure first, lieutenant."

"Guard them, please, while I step to the shore and see if they have not a boat— Ah! one of them has a rope, I see, evidently brought for you, but I will use it on them."

The three frightened men were then quickly bound, and leading them to the water's edge, their boat was found awaiting them.

"Let us take them on board your brig, lieutenant, and know who is at the bottom of this little plan to get rid of you."

"As you please, Captain Bainbridge; but my own boat awaits me a hundred yards up the shore, and we will go on board in that," was the answer, and the prisoners were marched up to the spot where the gig of the Brimstone, with two men and a coxswain in it, were awaiting the return of their captain.

Entering it, the officers and their prisoners were pulled rapidly out over the fog-clouded waters to the Brimstone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET FOE.

UPON arriving on the deck of the brig, the wounded prisoner was at once turned over to the surgeon to care for, and his wound having been dressed, he was led into the cabin, along with his comrades who had all been kept apart, so that they could arrange no story together.

"My man, I'll examine you first, as you are suffering."

"Remove the other two to the deck and await my call," said Manton Moncrief, addressing the wounded prisoner, a low-browed, evil-faced seaman.

The guard led off the other two, and the prisoner was alone, under the eyes of the officer he had sought to capture or kill, and the one who had thwarted the plans of his comrades and himself.

Robert Bainbridge sat in an easy-chair smoking, while Manton Moncrief was seated at the table, near a middy, who had an inkhorn, quill pen and paper before him.

"Your name, my man?" quietly asked Moncrief.

"Lemuel Ryder, sir."

The midly wrote down the reply.

"Are you a seaman?"

"Yes, sir."

"An American?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are English, my man."

"I am English, born, sir, but an American now."

"Ah! and what vessels have you served on?"

The man mentioned the names of several, which the midly wrote down.

"Now what are you doing in Charleston port?"

"Awaiting to ship, sir."

"Do you want a berth under me?"

"Yes, sir, when my arm gets well."

"Why did you seek to capture me, and threaten, if I resisted, you would kill me?"

"I was ashore, sir, dead broke, and had the offer of gold for a little work."

"What was that work?"

"To capture you, sir, and to kill you if you did not yield."

"I see."

"And your comrades?"

"I hired them to help me, sir."

"Who hired you, my man?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Mind you, I want the truth."

"I am telling the truth, sir."

"Remember, not many feet above your head, where you now stand, is a yard-arm, and ropes are plenty on board this brig."

"I'll tell all I know, sir."

"Do so."

"I was in the Patriot's Rest, having a glass of beer, when the landlord asked me for my bill, which I could not pay him, so he ordered me out into the street."

"I went, feeling awful blue and almost desperate, and I nearly ran up against a stranger who was standing outside, looking in through the window."

"You're in hard luck, my man," says he.

"Yes, sir, I am," says I.

"Need money?" says he.

"I'm dead wrecked," says I.

"Then he told me if I would do as he asked he would pay me well."

"I asked him what there was to do, and he placed in my hands a dozen pieces of gold, as much as a half year's wages, and said:

"Have you got two mates that can help you?"

"I said:

"What to do, your Honor?"

"Nothing very wicked," says he.

"So I told him I could get two mates right inside the Patriot's Rest, who were wrecked like myself in a money way, and he told me we were to go down the shore road to the large gateway leading into the grounds of Major Perry White, the Commandant of the Harbor Forts."

"We were to secrete ourselves in the shrubbery and wait for you to come out of the mansion, when we were to spring forward, with our pistols leveled upon you."

"I was to tell you to go quietly with us, and if you refused, we were to kill you."

"He did not tell me who you were, but said, if we took you prisoner to row out in the Cooper River with you, straight from the shore, where a boat would await us and take you on board, when we could go our way."

"He sent me in after my mates, telling me to give them some gold, which he handed me for them, and when we met the boat out on the river, we were each to have a handsome sum more; but we were not to kill you unless you fought us, which he said was not likely, as you were not armed, and moreover you was wounded in one arm."

"This is all I know, sir, excepting that while I went after my two mates, he got pistols and a boat for us."

"And who was this man?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"It will be to your interest, my man, to tell me."

"I could not see his face, sir, for you know there is a heavy damp mist, the night is very damp, and he kept his hat pulled down over his eyes, his collar turned up, and thus hid himself most perfectly."

"What kind of voice had he?"

"It struck me that he talked in a disguised voice."

"Ah! and his dress?"

"He wore a heavy sou'-wester, sir, and I could not see."

"Well, my man, stand yonder with your face turned from us, while I question your comrades."

Then Moncrief called for one of the other prisoners to be sent into the cabin, and this man went through a close catechism, as had the other.

His story tallied as to his having been called out of the Patriot's Rest by Lem Ryder, his shipmate, and asked to join him in a little plot that there was money in.

"He had been given some gold by Ryder, and they had been met by a stranger, so enveloped in face and form as not to be recognized, who had given them weapons and led them to a boat."

"He told him, and his comrade then on deck, that Lem Ryder had his orders, and they pushed off, pulling down the river to the house of Major Perry White."

"Then Ryder had told them what to do, and they had hidden in the shrubbery and awaited the coming of the officer whom they were to kidnap, or kill, failing to do the former."

The third man was then ordered into the cabin and his story coincided with the others, while he also could not tell who the plotter was, though he said:

"I know you, Cap'n Moncrief, sir, and had I know'd it were you we was to nab, or kill, I'd never hev gone there."

"No, sir, your name wasn't spoke, and not until that brave officer, Cap'n Bainbridge, run us down and took us in tow, did I suspect that it was you we was after."

"Well, my men, as you seem to tell the same story, I believe you tell the truth; but I am sorry I cannot find out who my enemy is, though it matters little now."

"If you wish to ship with me, you can do so, and say no more about it; but if not, I will turn you over to Captain Bainbridge here, who will see that you are punished for your work to-night, as the act was committed in his domain."

"Now what will you do?"

The men were only too glad to get off so easily and readily shipped under the man they had been hired to kill, while Robert Bainbridge said:

"You have made three faithful friends in those men, Moncrief, I assure you."

"I hope so, for I wish good men about me, those that will stand by my side and die, if need be; but who was this arch villain, Bainbridge, think you?"

"Wait awhile for my answer, please, that I may consider, after having looked at the matter more carefully," was the cautious reply, and, having accepted the hospitalities of the brig for the night, Robert Bainbridge retired to his state-room with the thought that he would be able to pick out the underhand foe of Manton Moncrief.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CHALLENGE.

WHEN Robert Bainbridge joined his boat at breakfast the following morning he found him

the same genial gentleman, with no shadow resting upon him of the occurrences of the night before.

"But for you, my dear Bainbridge, I would not be enjoying breakfast this morning, as I should not have submitted to the demand of that precious trio to surrender, without resistance, and doubtless they would have killed me."

"So you see I owe you my life."

"I hardly believe that these men would have killed you, though I think they would have thrown themselves upon you to capture you," was the reply.

"And my capture would doubtless have ended in my death, at the hands of my unknown enemy: but how was it that you followed me so closely for my idea was that the major detained you for some special instructions?"

"So he said, and he went up-stairs to get some papers for me; but Miss Hurst came over and said she had a fear of evil to you, and begged me to follow you quickly."

"I had had, strange to say, a like dread, regarding you, and, leaving Miss Sibyl to make my peace with the major I departed, and was just in time, I am glad to say."

"Heaven bless that sweet woman, I say, as well as you, Bainbridge; but what a remarkable girl she is, as good a sailor as I am, brave as any man, with a nerve of iron, a heart all nobleness, and a spirit and wit that is to be feared."

"My sentiments exactly," said Robert Bainbridge with a sigh.

"Well, captain, here is an epistle I wish you to read, and to place it in your hands for what use you deem best."

"It came before I got up, and was left by the bearer, who is to return for a reply," and Lieutenant Moncrief handed a letter to the soldier, the seal of which had been broken.

It was addressed to:

"LIEUTENANT MANTON MONCRIEF,

On board Brig-of-war Brimstone,

Charleston Harbor."

The handwriting was bold and legible, and opening it Bainbridge read aloud at the request of Lieutenant Moncrief, the following letter:

"Sir:—Upon my return to this port, I made known facts that had occurred at sea of a suspicious nature against you, implicating as they did your loyalty as an American and your honor as a naval officer."

"I need not refer to your taking sides with the British sloop-of-war against the American frigate President, for you understand the case in point."

"Also, your denials of my statements regarding you, imply falsehood upon my part, while your language last night to me, in the presence of others, implied that I shrunk from facing dangers."

"For these reasons, sir, I am forced to fling my glove in your face, demanding that you grant me a meeting."

"Your obedient servant,

"HUGH BRONX."

"Commanding Privateer Sea Scorpion."

A postscript followed this strange epistle which read as follows:

"Do not consider me ungrateful, as you have rendered me services in the past, in now challenging you; but I cannot and will not overlook what has occurred, as it places me in the light of a falsifier, and believing you to be a traitor, I feel that I will be doing a great good, should I rid the naval service of a man who is playing a double part."

"Well, Lieutenant Moncrief, this is a most remarkable communication," said Robert Bainbridge.

"Yes, it is a strange letter, but Bronx strikes me as being a very strange man."

"He certainly is; but what notice will you take of it?"

"What would you advise?"

"Well, you can get out of it very readily."

"In what way, should I desire to do so?"

"By making a charge against Bronx of hiring men to assassinate you."

"Ah! you think he was the one who hired those men?"

"I regret to say that I do."

"And your motives?"

"I can think of no one else, and, having listened attentively to all that has been said, by Captain Bronx, regarding you, recalling his behavior upon the time of your rescue of him, and his conduct last night, I cannot but feel that he is the guilty one."

"The same belief is forced upon me; but what could be his motive?" and Moncrief gazed earnestly into the face of the young soldier.

"I may be wrong, but I think he is jealous of you, of your reputation, your achievements where he has failed, and lastly, he has looked upon you as one that might step between him and his claim for the hand of Miss Hurst."

"Oh! you deem him than an aspirant there?"

"I am sure of it, from what I have seen."

"Thank you for your frankly spoken words, Captain Bainbridge, and I knew that you would have me make a charge against this man, Bronx, and thus avoid trouble with him; but, as he feels that I have wronged him, though it was far from my intention so to do, I will accept his challenge."

"Would you do this, Lieutenant Moncrief?"

"Yes, and ask you to be my friend in the affair."

"I will gladly serve you, Moncrief; but if this man is what we fear, I will be sorry to have you meet him."

"I may place him under further obligations," was the quiet remark.

"I know your courage and fighting ability with a ship, Lieutenant Moncrief, but as a swordsman, or shot, I do not, so pardon me if I tell you that Bronx has the credit of being a deadly marksman, and he disarmed our sword-master at the forts several times, in a friendly bout, I was told."

"I am neither a poor shot nor a bad swordsman, Bainbridge, so care not which weapons are chosen, nor when or where you decide upon for the meeting," was the indifferent reply of Moncrief; and as Captain Bainbridge was about to go ashore to make his peace with the major, a boat came alongside, and Rossmore, the first officer of the Sea Scorpion, came on deck, requesting to see Lieutenant Moncrief.

He was ushered into the cabin, and stated that he came for an answer to the note left some two hours before.

"Are you acquainted with the nature of that note, sir?" asked Moncrief.

"I am, sir."

"Then permit me to say that I shall grant the demand of Captain Bronx for a meeting, and I refer you to my friend here, Captain Bainbridge," and Moncrief went on deck.

Soon after he was joined by Robert Bainbridge, while Rossmore entered his boat and rowed to the Sea Scorpion, lying half a mile distant and already undergoing repairs, for workmen were busy upon her decks and rigging.

"I arranged for sunset this evening, Moncrief, weapons swords, and the place a bit of woods on the river shore above the town."

"All is satisfactory, my dear Bainbridge, so I will now accompany you ashore, as I desire to see Captain Hurst," and soon after the two friends ascended the broad steps of the White mansion, and were met by the major, who was at once told of the occurrence of the night before.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BETRAYED BY A VOICE.

THE arrival of the Brimstone in port, and with her a small British cruiser and a barque as prizes, the latter with a valuable cargo, which the American forces in the Carolinas stood greatly in need of, added to the fame of the young naval officer, and loud were the cheers given for him.

Seeing that the citizens had been so demonstrative, he had been anxious to escape into the house of Major White.

The skipper soon came out upon the piazza, and Sibyl was with him, gently aiding his steps, for he was still quite weak.

Sibyl glanced quickly at Robert Bainbridge, as though to read in his face if aught had happened the night before, but the soldier's countenance betrayed not the secret, and that of Moncrief was as placid as a millpond.

But out the major came with the story in his blunt way, though he had not heard it suggested to him by the young man that Hugh Bronx was the guilty one, so said nothing of him.

"The rascals! I hope we can trace them," said the major, adding:

"But you think you have a clew, you say, Robert?"

"Yes, major."

"Then follow it up, and I'll relieve you from duty at the fort."

"Egad, you are one to depend upon, and I could not understand your moving off last night, but I am very glad you did."

"And I believe Miss Hurst was the prompter, so I owe my life to her as well as to my gallant defender," said Moncrief.

Sibyl turned crimson to feel that she was known as having sent Captain Bainbridge to follow Moncrief, and said quickly:

"Somehow I feared trouble, and Captain Bainbridge willingly went at my suggestion, so all credit is due to him alone."

"I called, Captain Hurst, to ask you when you would be ready to sail in the Sea Siren, and to ask Miss Hurst if she would not rechristen the pretty craft after herself, for I learned from the men who were her crew as the Mermaid that you had the name of the Sea Siren."

"A very pretty compliment, Lieutenant Moncrief, and I accept the honor with pleasure," said Sibyl, while her father said:

"Yes, Sibyl was called the Sea Siren by the seamen of our craft, who often saw her in her little pleasure boat facing the fiercest gales and running in and out through the inlet, where the breakers threatened to swamp her, and I thought the Mermaid's name was well changed, when you told me what you wished to call her, Lieutenant Moncrief."

"Then I will have her armed and equipped, Miss Hurst, in a couple of days, and we will take a run out to sea in her, in company with the brig, which is a rapid sailer, that we may see if the change of rig has improved her."

"Perhaps Bronx will go in the Sea Scorpion, too, for we know just what her speed is, and it will be a fair test."

No one said aught for or against the Sea Scorpion's going in response to the skipper's suggestion, and soon after Manton Moncrief took his departure, to turn the barque and her cargo over to the port captain as a prize, and the major and Robert Bainbridge went down to the forts to attend to their official duties, the young captain intending to return soon, for Sibyl had whispered to him that she wished him to do so, as she had something to ask him.

In a couple of hours Captain Bainbridge returned to the mansion and Sibyl met him in the grounds, leading the way to an arbor where they would be free from intrusion.

"Captain Bainbridge, I wish to thank you for so promptly obeying my request last night," she said earnestly, extending her hand.

"I feel that I am more than repaid, Miss Sibyl in what occurred, and in receiving your thanks," was the low reply.

"May I ask you if you recognized the assailants of Lieutenant Moncrief?"

"No; I had not seen them before."

"And they were taken prisoners?"

"Yes."

"And where are they now?"

"On board the Brimstone."

"Were they seamen?"

"They were."

"Pardon a woman's curiosity, but did you question them?"

"Lieutenant Moncrief did."

"And they made known their motive?"

"Yes."

"Please tell me."

"They acted for gold, intending to capture the lieutenant if they could easily do so, but kill him if he resisted."

"What will their punishment be?"

"They have been forgiven and have shipped on the lieutenant's vessel."

"Dare he trust them?"

"I think so, for they were but tools."

"Ah! and their master?"

"They did not know him."

"They saw him?"

"Yes, but not his face."

"They described him?"

"Yes, but it was of no use, for he was enveloped in a sou'wester, had his hat pulled down over his eyes, and evidently disguised his voice."

"You told Major White that you thought you had a clew?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me whom you suspect?"

"If my clew proves right you shall know; but I would not wrong the one I have reason to suspect should he prove innocent."

"Let me tell you what I saw."

"You?" asked Bainbridge in surprise.

"Yes, for I came out soon after you did."

"Alone?"

"Oh, yes."

"You did wrong in these dread times, Miss Sibyl."

"I had no fear, and I wished to see what happened."

"I had a presentiment of evil, and I knew I could not sleep, so I threw a cloak about me and came out in the yard."

"All was still and I went toward the shore."

"I felt that nothing had gone wrong, and was about to return to the house, when I heard the dip of oars out upon the water."

"It was very foggy as you know, and very dark, so I waited, for I could not see a boat."

"Soon a boat appeared near shore, and, crouching behind yonder cedar I watched what it would do."

"It held but one occupant, and he landed and walked up and down the shore, as though searching for something."

"Then I heard him say:

"Their boat is not here; can they have landed at some other point?"

"Then he walked toward the mansion, passing within two feet of me."

"He must have gone quite up to the house, and seeing that the lamps in the library were out, returned, for he said as he passed me:

"Yes, he has gone, and they have either missed him, or I passed them out upon the river."

"I will return and search for their boat out on the waters."

"With this he walked down to his boat, and entering it, rowed away."

"He was the man the three men referred to, Miss Hurst, and he missed them by our allowing their boat to get adrift and taking them out to the brig with us."

"This man was enveloped in a storm-coat, as you state the men said he was?"

"Yes, Miss Hurst."

"And no one would have recognized him, but for one thing."

"And that?"

"His voice."

"Ah! you heard him speak?"

"Yes, and knew him by his voice."

"Will you tell me who he is, Miss Hurst?"

"Yes, I regret to say that it was Hugh Bronx."

"Then it is as I suspected, for he is the one that I had suspicion of."

"Then warn Lieutenant Moncrief, for Hugh

Bronx is a man who would stop at no crime to gain his end," was the earnest reply, and having given her warning, Sibyl returned to the mansion, while Robert Bainbridge went in search of Moncrief, to make known his latest discovery, so that the young naval officer need not fear he had maligned the privateersman in the suspicion they had held regarding him.

CHAPTER XXXII. SIBYL'S SAIL.

For some reason, inexplicable to herself, Sibyl Hurst felt strangely restless, after the departure of Captain Bainbridge.

The same dread of evil seemed to be upon her, and she went back and had a talk with her father, who was seated upon the piazza in his easy-chair.

"Father, what do you think of Hugh's actions of late?" she asked.

"He acts like a fool," was the quick rejoinder.

"He seems ill-humored with the whole world."

"Yes, he does not appreciate what has been done for him, and his seeming hatred of Moncrief is unaccountable, for he would not see that he had wronged the gallant fellow in suspecting him of treachery."

"Do you think he would seek to harm Lieutenant Moncrief in any way?"

"No, I do not believe that of him; but the truth is, he is envious of Moncrief, and his failings have made him more so, for Hugh has done nothing that was successful in his late ventures."

"I hoped he would do something as a privateersman, and so far he has disappointed me, and what course he now will pursue remains to be seen; but I wish him good-fortune."

"He parted with Lieutenant Moncrief last night, father, as though he meant to seek a personal encounter with him."

"He had better not," was the blunt reply.

"Why?"

"Well, for all of Moncrief's velvety manners and smiling face, he is a man that it will be most dangerous to arouse, and Hugh would stand no chance with him."

"Do you forget, father, that Hugh is a superb swordsman, disarming even you in your practice together, and that he is a dead shot, as well?"

"True, Hugh is a dangerous man with weapons, I admit; but Moncrief may be, too."

"It is not often two men of the skill of Hugh Bronx can be found, father."

"I agree with you there, my child; but then, Moncrief is cool-headed and can avoid trouble if he so wills, and I will send for Hugh and advise him to go to sea and win a name for himself, and this will keep them apart."

This caused Sibyl to feel less anxious; but still restless, she sprang into the sailboat belonging to the mansion, hoisted the sail, and went skimming away over the waters of the river.

She ran around the captured barque, which was being towed in to a dock to discharge her cargo, and then sailed near the schooner, which had been taken by Moncrief.

This craft had been hauled inshore, and men were already busy upon her, repairing the damages she had received in action.

Not far away was the Brimstone, and her crew were also at work upon her, while upon the shore, having just landed, were the prisoners from the two prizes under a guard that was to march them off to prison, a smaller squad in heavy irons being the pirate prize crew found on board the barque.

Anchored near shore she saw the Sea Siren in her new rig, and she admired the vessel greatly as she glided slowly by.

Only a short distance from the Sea Siren was the Sea Scorpion, and every man of her crew seemed to be at work on her from her topmasts to her water line, as though her commander was in great haste to get out to sea again.

Coming off from the shore were barges, bearing stores and the munitions of war, and all was busy work about the privateer.

Rossmore, whom she remembered as a gallant young sailor on the Mermaid, was pacing the deck of the Sea Scorpion, but Hugh Bronx was nowhere visible.

Sitting low in the cock-pit of the sailboat, and with a sailor's tarpaulin covering her head, Sibyl knew that it would take a good eye to recognize her at a little distance, and she consequently sailed near the different vessels, taking them all in with her skillful glance.

"The Sea Siren certainly is a beauty, and I hope she will sail even faster under her new rig," she muttered, turning her gaze again upon the pretty craft.

Gliding on up the river, to continue her sail, still further, she suddenly heard the sharp crack of a pistol from the shore.

Glancing in that direction she beheld a puff of white smoke rising above the tops of a clump of cedars, and soon after a second shot was heard.

As she glided by close inshore, she beheld the form of a man, and she started as she recognized him.

Heading her boat so as to command his movements through an open space in the cedars, she

saw him place a small white object upon the trunk of a tree, and stepping back once more, fire.

This he repeated again and again, each time walking forward and examining the target on the tree.

"Hugh Bronx is practicing for some purpose, I know," muttered Sibyl, as she turned her boat's prow down the river and started homeward.

As she went by the Sea Scorpion she saw that Rossmore had disappeared and that a strange officer held the deck.

"I am sorry, for I wished to speak to Rossmore, as I believe I could trust him," she said, as she sailed on her way.

Arriving at the mansion landing, she was lowering sail, when a voice near her said:

"Permit me to aid you, Miss Sibyl."

She glanced up quickly and saw Rossmore, the first officer of the Sea Scorpion, and he sprang from the little dock upon the deck of the boat as he spoke.

"Why, Rossmore, I am glad to see you, for, do you know, I was thinking of you a few moments ago, having seen you on the Scorpion's deck as I sailed by," and she extended her hand.

"I feel flattered, Miss Sibyl; but I recognized you as you went by, but for certain reasons did not speak to you."

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your promotion to an officer's berth."

"I thank you, Miss Sibyl, but I wish it was under a different commander."

"You do not like Hugh Bronx then?"

"Yes, in some respects; but, Miss Sibyl, I saw you in the boat, as I said, and knowing you would not be long away, I left the second officer in charge and coming ashore walked down here, for I wish to see you particularly."

"Well, Rossmore, how can I serve you?" asked Sibyl, who had always liked the handsome young sailor.

"Don't think me ungrateful, Miss Sibyl, for Captain Bronx made me what I am, and yet it is of him that I would speak."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Rossmore, for had you been on the deck as I passed back, I intended hailing you, and ask you to come ashore, for I wish also to talk to you about Hugh Bronx," was the reply of Sibyl, and the sail being furled she took a seat in the boat and motioned to the sailor to do likewise.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT ROSSMORE TOLD.

"Miss SIBYL, you must pardon me for troubling you, but I know your influence with Captain Bronx, and so I come to you," said Rossmore, after a moment of hesitation.

"Tell me what it is I can do, Rossmore, and count on my aid," was the reply of the young girl, who was convinced that no idle errand had caused Rossmore to come to her.

"Well, Miss Sibyl, the fact is, Captain Bronx has been good to me, made me his second officer on the schooner, and then after he killed—I mean after Vesey's death, he put me in his place as first officer, so it does not look well for me to talk behind his back."

"Is Vesey dead, Rossmore?"

"Yes, miss."

"Killed, I think you said?"

"Yes, Miss Sibyl."

"In battle, I suppose?"

"Well no, Miss Sibyl, but he was killed."

"On board ship?"

"He was."

"By whom?"

"I am sorry I spoke of him, Miss Sibyl, so do not ask me anything about him."

"I will not betray your confidence, Rossmore; but I thought I saw something happen on the deck of the Sea Scorpion, but spoke to no one about it."

"She was going out to sea, and I was waving good luck and farewell. When Bronx walked forward, and Vesey, I thought it was, sprang to the balliards and dipped the flag, when his captain ran back and struck him to the deck."

"Is this what I saw?"

"Yes, Miss Sibyl."

"And he killed him?"

"He did not mean to do so, I am sure."

"But he did?"

"Yes, miss."

"It was Vesey, then?"

"It was."

"He killed him for nothing?"

"Well, the first officer had no right to dip the flag without orders."

"He knew me, saw my waving kerchief, and supposed he was doing no wrong."

"Well, Miss Sibyl, we were all hurt by the captain's act; but he is king on board his vessel."

"I should think he was to do as he did; but now to what you wished to tell me, Rossmore?"

"Well, Miss Sibyl, the captain has not seemed his old self since we came into port on the Mermaid."

"He is stern, and more, he is very ill-tempered, and he has sought a quarrel with that gallant young naval officer, Moncrief."

"Ah! he seeks a quarrel with him, does he?"

"Yes, Miss Sibyl."

"From what reason?"

"I do not know, miss, for he owes Lieutenant Moncrief his life, as we all do, and more, we were rescued by him, after Captain Bronx got us captured by the English brig."

"The other day the lieutenant helped us out of a scrape at sea, and Captain Bronx said he was a traitor, going with the English sloop-of-war to fight an American vessel, but I believe he merely did it as a ruse for an escape, and stood the fire of the British craft to save us."

"You are right, Rossmore, for Lieutenant Moncrief so reported, and I suppose you are aware that he brought into port the British barque, which the pirate Bianca forced Bronx to give up?"

"Yes, and that enraged Captain Bronx, and I believe is one of the reasons he has quarreled with Lieutenant Moncrief."

"They have quarreled, then?"

"Yes, miss."

"When?"

"Last night, I suppose, for the captain sent me on board of the Brimstone this morning with a challenge."

"A challenge?" cried Sibyl.

"Yes, miss."

"To fight a duel?"

"Yes."

"And the result?"

"The lieutenant accepted it, of course, and in as pleasant a manner as though it was a note full of compliments."

"When was this?"

"Early this morning."

"How early?"

"Just as Lieutenant Moncrief finished breakfast."

"Was Captain Bainbridge with him?"

"He was."

"And Moncrief accepted?"

"He did."

"Who was his second?"

"Captain Bainbridge."

"And you acted for Bronx?"

"Yes, Miss Sibyl."

"And a meeting was arranged?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night at sunset."

"It is now about one o'clock?"

"Yes; just about one."

"And the place, Rossmore?"

"In the little grove up the river, opposite which you put about in your sail a short while ago."

"Ah, yes. I saw Captain Bronx there practicing with a pistol."

"Yes; he went there for that purpose."

"Then pistols are to be the weapons used?"

"No; swords were selected by Captain Bainbridge, but Captain Bronx said to me that he should disarm Lieutenant Moncrief with his sword, and offer him his life in such a way that he would demand another meeting, and pistols should be the weapons, when he would kill him."

"Ah! he has well laid out his deadly plot beforehand."

"Yes; and knowing what Captain Bronx can do with both the sword and pistol, Miss Sibyl, I came to you to see if this meeting cannot be prevented, for the lieutenant will be killed in this foolish affair just as he is making a great name for himself, for I am sure my captain has no mercy in his heart."

"I am glad you came to me, Rossmore, very glad; but can you see any way in which this matter can be stopped?"

"I confess that I cannot, Miss Sibyl; and I do not wish to be known in the affair, so please do not betray me."

"I will keep your secret, Rossmore, and I will do all in my power to stop this duel, for, as you say, Bronx is a deadly foe to meet and a merciless one."

"I am so glad I came to you, Miss Sibyl, for I wished to save that splendid officer, Lieutenant Moncrief, and repay in part the debt I owe him."

"I will not forget what you have done, Rossmore, rest assured; but now return to your vessel and leave me to think up some plan to thwart the deadly intent of Hugh Bronx." And after the sailor departed Sibyl walked toward the mansion in a most thoughtful mood, for her brain was busy trying to plot against a meeting between Hugh Bronx and Manton Moncrief, a meeting which she could not but feel would be a deadly one.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECOND TIME.

TRY as she might, Sibyl could not concoct any plan by which she could prevent the hostile meeting between the two men whom she dreaded to have meet.

She understood fully that Hugh Bronx having been disarmed by her, had turned his bitterness upon Lieutenant Moncrief, whom he regarded as the cause.

She also understood that the jealousy of Hugh Bronx had almost developed into madness, and that he would do any deed to get any man

out of the way whom he believed stood in his path to his successful suit for her hand.

From regarding him with kindness, and not sisterly love, she was beginning to detest him, and he was making of her a dangerous enemy.

So how to thwart him in his intention to remove Manton Moncrief from his way, was what worried her brain.

"I will do it if, as a last resort, I have to make him suffer deeply," she said, as she sat in the library after dinner.

The major had gone up into the town after dinner, her father had retired to his room for his usual rest, and Mrs. White was in her chamber with one of her sick headaches, so that Sibyl was alone.

Suddenly she started, for a quick step along the hall had ushered into the library a visitor whom she certainly had not expected to see.

That visitor was Hugh Bronx.

He had met the negro butler out in the grounds, and learned just how the field was clear for his seeing Sibyl alone, Black Ben not dreaming that he was paving the way for an unwelcome visitor.

"You here, Hugh Bronx?" and Sibyl arose haughtily.

"I am here, Sibyl, and to see you," was the answer, as he came forward.

"You should have given your name to the servant, sir."

"The servant told me I would find you here, alone, so I came in, for I wished to speak to you."

"I am surprised that you should dare cross the threshold of this home, after your conduct last night, which was so ungentlemanly."

"You call my accusation against Moncrief ungentlemanly?" he said, with almost savage earnestness.

"I think you strove to make him out a traitor to gain your ends."

"But you were foiled, for his own story proved how base were your charges against a man to whom you owe your life."

"And you believe his word against mine?"

"Assuredly, even were there not other proof of his innocence."

"What other proof?"

"His crew."

"Bah!"

"Oh! they are to be believed, for all would not lie in such a case, while his capture of the barque, which you were forced to run off and leave, and his capture of the British schooner-of-war, all show that he is loyal to the cause of America."

"You talk well to prove the innocence of the man you love," he said with a sneer.

"Will you do me the favor to answer me a question, Hugh Bronx?" she retorted quickly.

"If I can."

"Have you made up your mind to kill Lieutenant Moncrief in your duel with him at sunset to-day?"

The question came so unexpectedly that the man flushed and paled by turns, and Sibyl laughed lightly.

"How knew you this?" he asked hoarsely.

"It matters not."

"Ah! I know now."

"Well?"

"He has told you."

"Who?"

"Moncrief."

"You are mistaken."

"He has."

"I say no."

"He was afraid to meet me, although he accepted my challenge, so came to you, knowing you would prevent it if in your power."

"You do not know the man you have challenged, to say this of him."

"It is true."

"I say it is not."

"Will you swear that it is not true, Sibyl Hurst?"

"Yes, a thousand times yes, Hugh Bronx."

"Then he sent Bainbridge to you, which is about the same."

"Again you are wrong."

"As you seem to wish my word indorsed by my oath, I will swear that you are wholly wrong."

"You could get it from no other source."

"Oh yes."

"From whom?"

"That is none of your business."

"Ah! you defy me?"

"Of course, for what are you, to be defied?"

"You will rue the day that you throw insults in my teeth, Sibyl Hurst."

"I do not fear your threats."

"I threaten not idly."

"I care not how you threaten, I defy you."

"I came not here to quarrel with you," he said impatiently.

"What then came you for?"

"To ask you again to become my wife."

Sibyl laughed, a ringing, musical laugh, and yet there was a mocking sound in it that caused the man to grit his teeth with rage.

"You refuse again to be my wife?"

"I would rather be the wife of the lowest seaman on board your vessel."

"Ha! dare you say this to me?"

"Yes, and more if you wish me to do it."

"I will one day make you beg for mercy from me."

"A queer thing to say to the woman you ask to marry you."

"Sibyl!"

"Well?"

"I love you, and the thought of loving you drives me to madness."

"Forget all that I have said, and forgive!"

"You plead in vain."

"Be my wife, or at least pledge your word to me that one day, when I have won fame and riches, that you will be, and I will go away at once and begin to carve out a name that you will be proud of."

"Will you promise me this, Sibyl?"

He had spoken with impassioned earnestness, and eagerly awaited her reply.

It came, cold, cutting and merciless.

"Never! Never would I marry you, Hugh Bronx, for I know you to be as treacherous as a snake and an assassin!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THREATS.

HUGH BRONX shrunk back before the blazing eyes and words of Sibyl Hurst, and his whole form quivered as he asked in a hoarse voice:

"Do you call me an assassin?"

"Yes."

"No, no, I am no assassin," and he almost groaned the words.

"You are."

"You cannot prove it," he said quickly.

"I can."

"Do so," and he spoke defiantly.

"My own eyes saw you strike Officer Vesey to the deck."

He gave a sigh of relief and asked:

"Is that all?"

"All?"

"Yes."

"Is it not enough to murder a man?"

"I did not intend to kill him, but the blow proved fatal."

"He was your first officer and you had no right to strike him."

"I must keep my discipline on board my vessel."

"Bah! you are not fit to command men, for you cannot command yourself."

"He disobeyed my orders," he said, wincing under her words.

"He was sacrificed because you were angry with me."

"He was not."

"I say yes, for you saw my signal of farewell to you, and you would not acknowledge it."

"Poor Vesey saw it and did so, and his life was the forfeit."

"How knew you of this?"

"I saw it."

"You have good eyes."

"And ears, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind, but answer me if you intend to meet Lieutenant Moncrief to-night?"

"I do."

"You will not, for my sake, break this meeting?"

"If you will promise to be my wife, I will."

"I shall make no such promise."

"Then I will make no promises to you, Sibyl Hurst."

"You refuse?"

"I do."

"Then I shall see that you do not fight this duel."

He laughed.

"Do you doubt me?"

"I do."

"You think I cannot do so?"

"I know it."

"I can in one way."

"How?"

"I will go to Major White and have him accompany me to the captain of the port, and I will openly charge you with the murder of poor Officer Vesey and demand your arrest."

The man laughed again.

"You doubt my power to have this done?"

"It cannot be done."

"Why so?"

"Because I visited the port captain, reported my cruise, and told him of my killing my officer."

"He heard my story, told me that he was surprised that I would go to sea with such a set of wild, untrained men, and acquitted me of wrongdoing in the matter."

"Here is his paper," and Hugh Bronx took a paper from his pocket and handed it to Sibyl.

She saw that it bore the official seal of the port, and was signed by the captain of the port himself, and glancing at it she read there that it exonerated Captain Hugh Bronx of all blame in the killing of his mutinous first officer.

"You gained this by a falsehood, Hugh Bronx, for you did not tell the truth; but it protects you I suppose," she said in a disappointed way.

"Put it to the test if you think otherwise, fair Sibyl."

"No, I will put something else to the test."

"And that is?"

"I have another charge to make against you."

"Well?"

"It will not sound well against the captain of a privateer, flying the American flag."

"What is your charge, I ask you?"

"It will cause your arrest and trial, and upon your conviction you will doubtless swing at the yard-arm of Lieutenant Moncrief's vessel."

"In Satan's name what do you mean?" and his face became pallid, for he was convinced that she had found out something else against him.

"What about the three men you hired, to do some red work you feared to attempt?"

The question seemed to fairly stagger him, and he said hoarsely:

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say, sir."

"Three men?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"I know nothing about any three men."

"I do."

"What about them?"

"I know that they were hired by a man in a storm-coat and hat, and gold was paid them to kidnap Lieutenant Moncrief, and failing to do this they were to kill him."

"They tried to do their work well, and would have succeeded, but for the fact that I asked Captain Bainbridge to follow Moncrief when he left the mansion."

"He did so, and came upon Manton Moncrief, unarmed, wounded as he was, confronted by the three hirelings, who would have killed him, for he was not a man to submit without a struggle."

"Captain Bainbridge acts promptly and well, and he captured those three men, and they were taken as prisoners on board the Brimstone, where they now are."

"What have I to do with all this?"

"You were the man who hired them for their red work."

"It is false!"

"It is the truth."

"No man can prove this against me."

"A woman can."

"Never!"

"Oh, yes."

"Who is she?"

"I saw you land last night, for I went out into the grounds, and I heard your words spoken aloud, when you failed to find the boat of your men, and they had not met you on the river, as agreed upon."

"I heard your voice, Hugh Bronx, and I will swear to it."

"It is not true, for I was on board my vessel."

"You were here, sir, and the hour you left, and when you boarded your vessel can be proven."

"I say I am falsely accused."

"So was Manton Moncrief, and yet you were merciless in your hate of him, and I will be the same toward you, so give up this duel, find what excuse you may, or I will tell Major White all and let him report you as unworthy to command a vessel bearing the flag of our country."

The man seemed impressed by her words and stood for a moment in thought.

Then he said slowly:

"Sibyl, I am not guilty of this charge, but it would ruin me to have you bring it against me, and I yield to your demand."

"And you will not fight this duel?"

"No."

"Upon your oath?"

"Yes."

"How will you get out of it?"

"I will go to the place of meeting, tell Lieutenant Moncrief that I do not believe him guilty of treachery, and retract my challenge."

"Hugh Bronx, I thank you for this, from my heart, I do."

A vicious light flashed in the man's eyes as she uttered the words, for they but increased his jealous rage, but he said quietly:

"Good-by, Sibyl, but remember my threat that one day you shall be my wife."

Ere she could reply he turned and strode from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MEETING.

THE sun was near its setting, when a boat pulled away from the side of the brig-of-war Brimstone, and headed up the river toward a wooded point of land.

In it, besides the oarsmen and a coxswain, were Lieutenant Moncrief, Captain Bainbridge, and Surgeon Bennett.

Upon the seat near the surgeon was his box of surgical instruments, and a hand litter rolled up was in the boat, which showed that the worst had been prepared for.

Near Captain Bainbridge was a box of that ominous pattern that denoted it as a receptacle for dueling pistols, and a pair of rapiers, closely wrapped up were held across his lap.

Upon the faces of Moncrief and Surgeon Bennett there rested no shadow, but Captain Bainbridge looked a trifle anxious.

Arriving at the point of land the boat grounded, and the three officers sprung ashore, the coxswain and his men remaining in their places.

"You can land if you wish to, lads, and witness a little scene that is to be enacted here," said Moncrief in his pleasant way, and the men saluted and sprung ashore, the coxswain bearing the litter, and his men the weapons and surgical case.

A walk of a few hundred paces brought them to an open space, the same in which Sibyl had seen Hugh Bronx practicing that afternoon.

Here the party halted.

"We are first on the scene," said Captain Bainbridge.

"I saw the other boat coming as we entered the thicket," Moncrief responded.

Then he moved about carelessly, while the surgeon opened his case of instruments and got all in readiness, and Robert Bainbridge laid out his weapons.

Soon there appeared at the shore a second boat.

In it were four oarsmen, a coxswain, and two officers.

The latter were Hugh Bronx and Rossmore, his first officer.

The face of the former was positively wicked in its expression, and that of the latter anxious.

"Meet them, please, Bainbridge, and say that I gave my crew permission to be here," said Moncrief.

"Captain Bainbridge walked rapidly toward the shore, and saluting politely, said:

"Mr. Rossmore, Lieutenant Moncrief gave his coxswain and two men permission to go on the field, and you are of course at liberty to do likewise if so you wish."

"Thank you, sir," and turning to his commander, he continued:

"You heard what Captain Bainbridge just said, sir?"

"Yes."

"And your response?"

"Let them come, for they will be entertained," was the reply.

Captain Bainbridge felt like resenting the words and manner of the man, but wisely refrained, and all moved toward the open space in the woods.

Arriving there Moncrief saluted all politely, raising his hat courteously, and arrangements were at once begun for the duel.

The preliminaries were soon arranged, Robert Bainbridge showing that he was an expert in the art of being second, while Rossmore had never been on the field before.

Seeing this Captain Bainbridge was very courteous, and all was arranged most satisfactorily to both sides.

The principals were then placed in position and their swords handed to them.

Moncrief, up to that moment, had been smoking a cigar, and his face turned toward the west, he seemed to be enjoying greatly the beautiful sunset, while the light revealed not a symptom of emotion upon his handsome features.

Called by Bainbridge to take his stand, he had thrown his cigar away, smiled pleasantly and stepped to his position.

Upon the face of Hugh Bronx still rested that look of maliciousness, a triumphant flash being in his eyes.

He had been pacing to and fro, his hands behind his back, until called by Rossmore, and then he had walked briskly forward.

It had been decided to use the brace of swords which belonged to Hugh Bronx, and he grasped his weapon as though it was the hand of a well-tried friend.

Moncrief had taken the weapon handed to him by Bainbridge, in an easy way, tried its temper casually, and then both men were ready, Bronx throwing his left hand behind his back, while his adversary still carried his in a sling, but lowered to his belt, so as not to be a barrier to the point of a sword reaching the heart.

The swords were crossed, and Bainbridge stood between the combatants, his blade held up beneath theirs.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" he asked sternly.

Moncrief bowed, and Bronx said impatiently:

"Yes."

Down fell the sword of Captain Bainbridge and he stepped quickly back.

But neither blade moved, for each seemed to be measuring the strength of the other.

The face of Hugh Bronx was now really wicked in the glitter of his eyes, while Moncrief was placid and smiling.

A moment of suspense, with their seconds watching them, Surgeon Bennett unmoved and with arms folded standing near, and the two groups of seamen in the background, made up a picture that was most thrilling.

Then Hugh Bronx began the fight by a lightning-like movement intended to disarm his foe.

To his surprise he did not succeed.

Again he tried a sudden device, and once more was foiled.

He changed to an attack then, and again he was met with a defense he had not expected.

He was simply amazed, for his skill had never met its equal before.

Enraged, he began a savage attack, forgetting his intention to humiliate Moncrief by disarming him and giving him his life, and determined to kill him.

But he was foiled at every thrust, and with a skill that was marvelous, a nerve that was like iron, while the pleasant smile never left the lips of Manton Moncrief, and the color in his handsome face was in striking contrast to the pallor of his adversary.

Instantly the face of Robert Bainbridge cleared of its shadow, for he had feared the result, knowing of the remarkable skill of Hugh Bronx, though Surgeon Bennett had told him there was no cause for dread, as his commander was a fine swordsman.

Being a fine master of fence himself, Captain Bainbridge soon saw that Moncrief was fully the equal of Bronx, and he watched the combat with the greatest interest as a piece of expertness on both sides which he had never seen equaled.

Several times did Hugh Bronx show a desire to lower the blades for an instant of rest, but just then Moncrief would begin to press him, and he would be forced to struggle on, and did so with a furious attack, as if to cut his adversary to pieces.

As the fierce battle continued, the smile suddenly left the face of Manton Moncrief, and he changed from the defensive to the attack.

His eyes were threatening now, and his lips sternly set, and the manner in which his blade was handled showed to the lookers-on that Moncrief had simply been playing with his enemy before.

"His mastery of the sword is phenomenal," whispered Robert Bainbridge to the surgeon, who responded in the same low tone:

"I told you to have no fear of the result."

Rossmore and the seamen were also amazed, but no one more so than was Hugh Bronx himself.

From its being a science with him, and never having met his equal, he had come to think that he would never find his match.

In a few short moments he had discovered his master, and he became livid with rage and fought with desperation.

Pressing him backward step by step, Moncrief seemed at last to tire of the sport, for to him it seemed nothing more, and suddenly he sent the sword of Hugh Bronx flying in the air.

Bronx shrunk back, pallid as a corpse, expecting his death-thrust; but Moncrief said sternly:

"Captain Bronx, I give you your life—yes, and your sword, too!"

And he took the weapon from the hands of his coxswain, who had picked it up, and gracefully handed it to him.

Not a word passed the white lips of Hugh Bronx for fully a quarter of a minute, and then he hissed forth:

"I demand a meeting with pistols."

"And I say no!" came from the lips of Sibyl, as she suddenly appeared from behind a thicket, before the astonished gaze of the duellists.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MAD ACT.

THE appearance of Sibyl Hurst upon the dueling-field was a surprise to all, with one exception, and that one was Rossmore, who had anxiously hoped for her coming, or looked for some interruption of the duel through her agency.

She was dressed in her riding-habit and carried her whip in her hand.

Her face was flushed from excitement, and she looked grandly beautiful, as she walked briskly toward the group on the field.

"Miss Hurst, this is no scene for you, and I must request that you allow Surgeon Bennett to at once escort you home," said Manton Moncrief with a sternness that surprised her, while Hugh Bronx said with a sneer:

"She has come to save your life, doubtless; but I demand that you grant me a second meeting, and with pistols."

"Lieutenant Moncrief, I am here for a purpose, and but for the fact that I could not cross a fence with my horse, I would have been here sooner."

"I however arrived in time to see you give that man a life he does not deserve, and who meant to take yours."

"And more, he pledged his word to me this afternoon that he would not meet you, and he has broken it, and now I say he shall not have a second meeting, and I command him to depart at once, for he is unworthy of your notice, and as a gentleman you can decline to meet one who is not."

"This to me, Sibyl Hurst!" cried Hugh Bronx savagely, and he stepped forward threateningly; but there was that in the faces of those about him that checked his intention, whatever it was.

"Go, sir, ere I make known all," cried Sibyl, sternly, and her eyes flashed fire as she spoke.

He met her gaze and seemed to read there that she meant all that she threatened, and a muttered curse escaped his lips as he half-turned away.

Then he said with a sneer:

"As I will not engage in a duel before a lady, I shall postpone our meeting until another time, Lieutenant Moncrief."

"As you please, sir," was the cool reply, and beckoning to his men to follow, he called to Rossmore and was walking toward his boat, when he saw that his lieutenant was not following him.

"Come with me at once, sir!" he shouted, furiously.

"No, Captain Bronx, I decline to serve with you longer, sir, so resign my position," was the calm reply.

"Did you hear me, sir?"

"I did."

"And you refuse to obey?"

"I do."

"Remember, you are under my command."

"I acted here, sir, as your second, not as an officer, and my berth I give up."

"Obey me, sir, or take the consequences as a mutineer!" fairly shouted Hugh Bronx, frenzied with passion.

"I will not obey your command, Captain Bronx."

"Then die!"

As Hugh Bronx spoke he threw his right hand forward and it was seen to hold a pistol.

In an instant came a flash and report, and the desperate man walked rapidly on, his boat's crew crowding close upon his heels.

But he had seen one man fall, and a wicked smile crossed his lips as he muttered:

"That ends his life."

But it was not Rossmore that had fallen, for the bullet had flown wide of him and entered the side of Manton Moncrief, who sunk to the earth with a low moan.

A cry of horror broke from every lip, and Sibyl sprung forward and threw herself by the side of the fallen man, while she cried in piteous tones:

"Save his life, Surgeon Bennett! save him from death, I pray to you!"

The surgeon was already by his side and examining his wound.

"Come, lads, get the lieutenant on the litter and carry him to his boat, for this is a very bad wound."

"He is not dead, then?"

"No, Miss Hurst."

"Thank God! but will he live?"

"I hope so."

Turning, without a word Sibyl glided away in the gathering gloom, going the way she had come, and as the party bearing Moncrief reached the boat, they heard the clatter of her horse's hoofs, as she rode at full speed back to the town.

"Will you permit me to lend what aid I can, for I am the unfortunate cause of the lieutenant's wound?" said Rossmore to Captain Bainbridge, who responded in his frank way:

"My dear sir, you are not to blame, and I honor you for severing your connection with such a man."

"Captain Bainbridge, that shot was not aimed at me, sir."

"Hail say you so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you think so, Mr. Rossmore?"

"I stood ten feet to one side of Lieutenant Moncrief, and Captain Bronx is a dead shot, sir."

"By Heaven! I believe you are right."

"I had intended to go with the captain, but wished first to speak with Miss Hurst; but when ordered in the manner that I was, I declined."

"You did right, sir; and if Lieutenant Moncrief dies, that man Bronx will go to the yard-arm!" and Robert Bainbridge spoke earnestly.

"The Sea Scorpion is getting under way, sir," said Rossmore, as they rowed down the river.

"You are right, and we have no power to stop her; but I will go and see the port captain, and see if he will not send the brig in chase, under Moncrief's lieutenant."

"He must not go to sea, sir, for absolute quiet alone can save him," said the surgeon.

"True; and his quarters are on the Drimstone—but can we not take him to the Sea Siren?"

"She is getting her armament on board," said the surgeon.

"Ah! I have it: I will take the liberty of taking him to my kinsman's, Major White, for there he will be most welcome."

"It would greatly add to his comfort, Captain Bainbridge," Surgeon Bennett remarked.

"Then we will head for the mansion port—see! the Sea Scorpion is well under way, but the brig can catch her if the port captain orders her in pursuit."

As the boat neared the brig, a large vessel was seen coming from along side of it, and Robert Bainbridge at once said:

"It is Major White's large, and it is coming toward us."

The large vessel was soon near to the boat, and Major White called out:

"Is that the Drimstone's boat?"

"Ay, ay, major."

"Ah, Bainbridge! that is you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have Moncrief there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, sir, but very seriously wounded."

"So Sibyl said, for she met me at the city wharf as I was starting home."

"I told her to ride on and have a room prepared—so row at once for the mansion."

"I thank you, sir; it will be a great help to Lieutenant Moncrief's recovery to be there," said Surgeon Bennett.

The boats were now near together, and Bainbridge said:

"Did Miss Hurst tell you how he was wounded, sir?"

"Yes, by a shot meant for another, in the hands of that mad fool, Bronx."

"Here is Captain Bronx's first officer, major, and his second, and he says the shot struck the one for whom it was intended."

"Ha! this looks bad, Bainbridge."

"Yes, sir; and worse, to see the Sea Scorpion already on her way out to sea."

"By Heaven! you are right; but the Brimstone can go in chase."

"I am sorry to say, sir, the Brimstone has now but one officer on board who could command," said Surgeon Bennett.

"If I would be considered capable my services are at your command," Rossmore said.

"I advise that Mr. Rossmore's offer be accepted, for the Brimstone might catch the schooner if she started soon, before she got many leagues away," Robert Bainbridge said.

"True, and she must try it, for I will set you on board the brig, Mr. Rossmore, and take the responsibility as port commandant of ordering the Brimstone to give chase."

The boats now ran alongside, and Rossmore leaped into the barge, which at once pulled for the brig, while Captain Bainbridge ordered his men to give way with all haste for the White mansion.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BRIG SETS SAIL.

UPON arriving on board the Brimstone Major White quickly made his errand known to the lieutenant in command, and presented Rossmore as one to aid him as a junior officer.

He told of the duel, of the wounding of Lieutenant Moncrief, and his having been taken to the mansion, and added:

"Surgeon Bennett told me, Lieutenant Roe, that you were short of officers, one being in charge of the prize, your captured schooner, and Mr. Rossmore has volunteered to aid you, having severed his connection with Captain Bronx."

"The Sea Scorpion has a league the start of you, but I hope you can catch him, and as I said, I will take all responsibility of sending you to sea in chase."

"I thank you, Major White, but it is a case where I would readily assume responsibility to catch that man Bronx, whose conduct I think is detestable."

"And, Mr. Rossmore, I gladly accept your aid, sir, and you can get the brig under way, and crowd her with all she will stand," said Lieutenant Roe.

Rossmore was a thorough sailor, and had risen from a boy before the mast, so there was not a rope about a ship he did not know well.

He had sailed on vessels from a Massachusetts coaster to a ship-of-the-line, and his fine voice rung out with a thrill, as he gave his orders, that sent the men to work with a zeal that showed they obeyed one fit to command.

"Egad, but that young fellow has stuff in him," said the major.

"He has, indeed, sir, and I hope I can retain his services, for he seems to be the gentleman as well as the officer," replied Roy Roe, glad to see that he was to be so ably seconded.

Wishing the young officer success, the major bade him farewell, and went over the side into his boat, which at once pulled rapidly down the river toward his home.

As he reached his landing the Brimstone went flying by, under clouds of canvas, in hot chase of the schooner, now a long way ahead.

In the darkness Sibyl came toward him and said quickly:

"The Brimstone has gone in pursuit?"

"Yes, Sibyl, and she is fairly flying, as you see."

"Rossmore went on her, Captain Bainbridge said."

"Yes, and he's a splendid officer, too, as the seamen of the brig seemed to recognize at a glance; but he was with you on the Mermaid, was he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what kind of officer did he make?"

"He was only a seaman, but a splendid one, and father often said he was fitted for the quarter-deck, for he is a fine fellow, and I believe has been a sailor all his life, his father having been a sea-captain."

"Well, I hope he will do well enough to get a berth on the brig; but how is Moncrief?"

"There is no change, sir, and Surgeon Bennett is now searching for the bullet, which entered just over the heart."

"What a pity; but Rossmore told me of the

affair and said that Moncrief fairly played with Bronx in the sword combat."

"He did, sir; but how strange that the bullet intended for Allen Rossmore should fly so wild as to hit Lieutenant Moncrief!"

"Rossmore says the bullet hit the man it was aimed at."

Sibyl stopped short at the steps, for the two had walked on toward the mansion as they talked.

"What did you say?" she asked in a whisper.

"Rossmore said that the anger of Bronx with him was but a blind to fire upon Moncrief."

"Major White, I am convinced now that this is the truth."

"Yes, Allen Rossmore is right, the bullet hit the man for whom Hugh Bronx intended it, and I pray that the Brimstone may catch him and he be punished."

"If I had my way I would string him up to the yard-arm," said the major.

"He deserves it, sir, and if Manton Moncrief dies, then shall Hugh Bronx die," and Sibyl spoke with a voice so full of depth and feeling that the major was amazed.

Entering the house they were met by Captain Bainbridge, who had just descended from the room where the wounded officer lay.

Both glanced anxiously into his face, and he said quickly:

"Surgeon Bennett has found the bullet."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Sibyl.

"And what says he, Robert?" asked the major.

"He says there is hope, for Moncrief has a constitution of iron, and may pull through all right."

"God grant it."

"To that I fervently say amen, major; but what of the brig?"

"She has gone after the Sea Scorpion at a splendid pace."

"I hope she may catch her; but did Rossmore go?"

"Yes, and he will render good service."

"I believe it, for I like the young man, and was struck with him when he came as the second of Captain Bronx; but I will go to the fort now, sir, so have you any orders?"

"No, Robert, but come up to breakfast, or sooner, if you have to report the capture of the Sea Scorpion by the brig."

"I hope I will have to do so, major, but I fear this breeze is dying out."

Sibyl stepped quickly to the piazza and raised her hand.

"Yes, this a land breeze, and I fear will not last long; but there may be a good wind out upon the sea," she said, with the air of one who knew of what she spoke.

Bidding the major good-night, and bowing to Sibyl, Robert Bainbridge walked away muttering to himself:

"It is true; I can never win her, for her secret is betrayed. She loves Moncrief, and she is not a woman to love but once."

And standing on the piazza, gazing out into the gloom, and far down the harbor, the major having gone up to see his wounded guest, Sibyl said:

"Heaven help him, for if he should die I would become revenged, and Hugh Bronx should hang."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PURSUER AND PURSUED.

WHEN Hugh Bronx fired the shot that struck Lieutenant Manton Moncrief, he believed that he had given him his death-wound.

As Rossmore had said, the shot had not been at him, though Bronx meant that it should so be considered.

Seeing his victim fall, he had quickly entered his boat, and his oarsmen had no need of being told to row hard, for they saw by the face of their captain that he intended that they should do so.

"But for the secret that Sibyl Hurst holds, I need not fly, but remain and face an investigation, as it would be thought an accident, to kill Moncrief, and I had a right to subdue mutiny among my own officers," he muttered.

"No, she will do all in her power to punish me, and she will gain the port captain over, as she has the port commandant now on her side."

"I will find it best to leave at once, and there will be no need for me to enter this port again, as she will return to her home on Long Island, and I can see her there."

For a moment he was quiet, and then he said savagely:

"I have ended his career, and so shall perish every rival for her hand!"

Reaching the schooner, his voice rung out with orders to get up the anchor and set sail before he got fairly on the deck.

His vessel had been undergoing repairs, which were not completed, and his crew had not been increased, in the short time since his arrival; but that mattered not, when he felt himself in danger, and he determined to go at once to sea.

His stern commands made the crew work with a will, and the schooner was moving away from her anchorage, and, under her sails, set as

rapidly as possible, began to forge through the waters.

The wind was blowing about ten knots, and directly astern, while the tide also favored her, and the Sea Scorpion went down the harbor at a lively rate of speed.

"There will be weeping and wailing in that grand mansion to-night; but so shall all your lovers die, Sibyl Hurst!" said Hugh Bronx, as he gazed upon the home of Major White while the schooner was gliding by.

The forts were soon after left astern, and the open sea seemed to insure safety, for the fugitive privateersman seemed to have no dread of pursuit.

"Sail ho!"

The cry came from the man whom Hugh Bronx had appointed to act as first officer in the place of Rossmore.

"Whereaway?"

He asked the question eagerly.

"Dead astern, sir; she is coming out of the harbor after us."

The privateersman called for his glass and leveled it at the sail.

"It is the brig-of-war Brimstone, and she is crowding on sail in chase."

"Ho, men, set the topsails, throw water on the sails, and do all you can to make this craft jump ahead, for there is a vessel astern that must not catch us!"

The men sprung to obey with a will, and the schooner was soon doing her best.

But the wind grew lighter and lighter, and, by the time the schooner was well out to sea, she was hardly making three knots.

The brig however seemed to still hold a breeze and was coming rapidly along.

Cursing his ill fortune, Hugh Bronx knew not what to do.

The vessel in chase was under an officer of the regular navy, and he was but a privateersman, so must obey if ordered by his superior.

If he dared fight the brig, he knew that the combat would be but a short one, and he would be taken, and hanged.

He was in a frenzy of dread, when the first officer, a burly, weather-beaten seaman, said:

"Cap'n we have sweeps aboard."

"You are right," cried Hugh Bronx gladly, remembering that Moncrief had had the Sea Scorpion fitted with six heavy sweeps to a side.

They had been lying in the hold unthought of before; but they were quickly ordered on deck.

"The wind has left us, sir," said Hutchins.

"It has indeed, but the brig still comes on."

"She is barely moving, sir, as you can see if you look close."

"Yes, she is becalmed, as we are; but they are lowering their boats," said Hugh Bronx who had his glass to his eye.

As he spoke a bright flame shot from the bows of the brig, and a shot came flying after the schooner.

It however did no damage, and the distance was so great that it fell into the sea soon after passing the schooner.

That the boats were being lowered from the brig, the seamen of the schooner knew, for they had heard the words of their commander, and they seemed anxious to get the sweeps out.

These were brought up, twelve in number, and were some twenty-five feet long, with heavy blades, and two men were put to each sweep.

Sail was taken in, so as not to retard the schooner's motion, and the heavy sweeps were set to work.

A glass showed Captain Bronx that seven boats, filled with men, were coming from the brig.

He knew well that Moncrief's crew idolized him, and that they would seek quick revenge for his death, for he had not a doubt but that he had killed him.

He anxiously watched the movement of the schooner, to see how rapidly she was being urged forward by the sweeps, and was glad to see that they were making good time.

The brig still kept up her fire, and one shot fell on deck, killing the man at the wheel, and rolling forward, injured two more.

"Pull hard, you devils, and we will escape them!" and Hugh Bronx went forward among the crew, urging them with oaths and promises of reward, if they kept ahead of the boats.

But some one was urging on the oarsmen of the boats also, for they came rapidly on.

"There's our friend, sir," said Hutchins, and he came up to the side of Hugh Bronx and pointed to a dark cloud rising above the horizon.

"A storm!"

"Yes, sir."

"The boats will reach us first."

"They dare not risk it, sir, for they must get back to their vessel."

"Yes, for they are miles away from her."

"Yes, sir."

"But they are gaining on us rapidly, Hutchins."

"Yes, sir, but our men must do better."

"Shall I put three at each sweep?"

"Yes, at once."

The extra men were called and placed, and it took all of the schooner's crew, with the exception of the officers, and Hutchins took the wheel.

With this extra weight upon the sweeps, the schooner moved forward more rapidly, but the boats were seen to be still gaining.

"They are pulling as though they meant to risk all to catch us."

"Yes, sir, but they will soon have to calculate how long it will take, and how long before the storm strikes, not to speak of the distance back to their vessel."

"I believe they are giving it up, Hutchins," and Bronx turned his glass upon the boats.

"Yes, sir, I think so, too," and Hutchins glanced astern.

"They are putting back," gladly cried Bronx.

The crew gave a cheer and stopped rowing, but with bitter oaths Bronx set them to work again, and when they were ordered to cease rowing and draw in their sweeps, the storm was almost upon them, and the brig miles away.

To set stormsails and get the Sea Scorpion ready to meet the storm was soon accomplished, and the schooner went driving on through the darkness and gale, her fugitive commander congratulating himself upon his escape from his pursuers.

"Luck has returned to me, for I have killed Moncrief and escaped from his crew."

"Now I shall carve out my fortune in my own way," he muttered, and he told Hutchins to head for New York Harbor, where he knew he could fit out his vessel and add to his crew.

CHAPTER XL. THE RETURN.

THERE stands to-day, not far from the sea, upon Long Island, a handsome old mansion which, a hundred years ago, was the first homestead to be seen along the coast.

There, a century ago, was the home of Captain Norman Hurst, which he had found for himself in the New World to which he had come.

Broad acres surrounded it, with comfortable houses for the laborers, ornamental grounds met the eye, a broad avenue of cedars and Lombardy poplars led up to the door from the highway, and massive elms protected it from the severe gales that swept across the sea.

Within all was comfort, nay, luxury in that early day, and it was a home where one would be content to spend his allotted days of life.

From the broad piazzas a grand view could be seen of the ocean, half a mile away, and an inlet, a secure anchorage for vessels, if their skipper knew the channel in through the surf.

A couple of miles from Hurst Haven, as Sibyl had named the homestead, was another substantial mansion, though not so grand in its appearance, nor were its acres surrounding as numerous.

There had dwelt the Bronx family for several generations, and there it was that the widowed mother of Hugh Bronx dwelt with her only daughter, Bessie, a beautiful girl of seventeen at the time of the opening of this story.

A woman of refinement, she had been left a comfortable fortune by her husband, a sea-captain, and she was wrapped up in her two children, Hugh and Bessie.

Between the families of Hurst Haven and the Bronx homestead there had existed a warm friendship. Mrs. Bronx had been very glad to have Hugh sail under the command of Captain Hurst, though she knew the peril of the voyage.

The fond mother had also been glad to know that her son loved Sibyl, and she hoped one day to see the maiden his wife.

One afternoon, Bessie Bronx was seated in a front window of Flag Ship Hall, as Captain Bronx had named his home, gazing out upon the sea, half a mile distant, which was tossed by a fierce wind that was blowing.

"Mother, there is a schooner coming along the coast, and close inshore," she said, as a vessel appeared in sight.

"Not a brig?" quickly asked the mother, coming over to the window.

"No, mother, it is not the Mermaid, but an armed vessel as I can see."

"I will get my glass and have a look at her," and rising Bessie went out into the hall.

There she put on a storm coat and tarpaulin, and taking down a large spy-glass from a bracket, she went out upon the piazza and took her stand near the window where her mother sat.

There was a driving rain, and the wind blew with vicious force, but half protected by the large pillars of the piazza, she turned her glass upon the vessel.

"It is a large armed schooner, mother, and flies the American flag," she called out.

"She is standing very close inshore, Bessie," called back Mrs. Bronx.

"Yes, mother, and I do believe she is heading for the Rockaway Inlet."

"Then some one we know must be on board."

"Yes, mother, and perhaps it may be Hugh coming back, with Captain Hurst and Sibyl, for you know, if the Mermaid proved to be all the skipper expected, he intended to give the brig to the Government, and then be sent home on a cruiser."

"I hope so, Bessie, for I long to see Hugh," was the answer.

Watching the schooner closely, Bessie saw her suddenly change her course and head directly for the inlet.

She then came on under stormsails alone, and after seeing her make one or two changes, which proved that she had a pilot on board who knew the dangerous channel into the inlet, or haven, Bessie called out:

"Yes, mother, she is coming into the inlet, and I feel that we will see Hugh soon; but it is getting too dark to see much more now," and the young girl entered the house.

"It must be Hugh, Bessie," said her mother, as she entered the room, "as she runs in by night."

"Yes, mother, for no one but Hugh, Captain Hurst and Sibyl, that I know of, could pilot a large vessel such as the schooner, in by night."

"Then if one has returned, all have; but I suppose we will soon know, as Hugh will come up home, so I will have a splendid supper prepared for him," and the good mother went out to the kitchen to order a sumptuous repast for her son, should he return on the schooner that had just run in to an anchorage in the inlet.

Half an hour after the two sat in the room awaiting anxiously for the footsteps on the piazza.

The blinds had been left open, and a cheery fire was burning upon the spacious hearth, casting its ruddy rays far out into the darkness.

Suddenly out of the gloom a man's form appeared, and he was enveloped in a storm hat and coat.

He paused as he reached the piazza, and gazed in through the open window.

"There sit my mother and sister," he murmured.

"Oh! if they but knew all," and then he stood in silence for full a minute.

A sigh at last broke from his lips, and he passed his hand across his eyes, while he muttered:

"What a fool love has made of me, ay, more than a fool."

"But I must not stand here, but go in," and he ascended the steps, crossed the piazza with a quick step and had his hand upon the huge brass knocker, when the door was thrown open and Bessie Bronx, with a glad cry sprung into her brother's arms.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FUGITIVE PRIVATEERSMAN.

WHEN Hugh Bronx had thrown off his storm suit, and sat down before the blazing fire, both his mother and sister saw that a great change had come over him.

He looked much older, in the few months he had been away, his eyes were deep set, his face haggard, and he had a stern look about his mouth that had not been seen there before.

"Why, Hugh, you have been sick," cried Mrs. Bronx, anxiously.

"Or wounded?" his sister asked.

"No, I have been neither ill or wounded, but I have passed through a fearful ordeal since I left home," was the reply.

"Oh! when will this long and cruel war come to an end?" said Mrs. Bronx.

"Mother, it is not the war that has affected me."

"What then, Hugh?"

"My pain is here, in my heart, and in my brain."

"Why, Hugh, what has happened?"

"It is better to tell all, I suppose," was his moody reply.

"Yes, tell all, for here you have those who love to sympathize with you," his mother returned.

"Mother, did you believe that Sibyl Hurst could be false?"

"No, my son, no, I cannot believe it of her."

"Well, she is false, false as Hades."

"Oh, Hugh!" cried Bessie.

"I know that you love her devotedly, Bess; but so do I, and yet I tell you that she is false."

"She lured me on to love her, and I felt that I was one day to call her my wife, but she was trifling with me."

"You cannot have understood her, Hugh."

"Yes, mother, I know her but too well."

"Tell me what has occurred."

He was silent a moment and then told how the brig had been sent on the dangerous errand to Charleston, and being chased and captured by Bianca, the Buccaneer, how it had come out that the pirate was the brother of Skipper Hurst.

The reasons for Captain Hurst giving up his home in England, his title and all, he did not tell, nor that the pirate sought to hang his brother.

"We were rescued," he continued, "by a cruiser, once a privateer, her captain being a man by the name of Moncrief, and whom you have heard of as the Dashing Privateersman."

"Indeed! he has won a great name, and was made an officer of the regular navy," said Mrs. Hurst.

"Well, mother, he sent his surgeon on board

to attend to the wounded skipper, and Sibyl fell in love with him."

"Then, when we reached Charleston I saw that she no longer cared for me."

"This man, Moncrief, was captured by a British brig-of-war, which chased us to Charleston, and then anchored off the port with her prize, and I raised a crew, placed them on an old barque in port and sought to rescue the schooner's crew."

"But the brig was too strong for me and I was captured with all my men."

"Oh, Hugh!"

"My son!"

Such were the exclamations that broke from the lips of mother and daughter.

"It seems that Moncrief, however, had made his escape in some way, and reaching Charleston he led an attack on the brig, with a large force, and captured her, and, with the aid of his men, who were prisoners, and my band in the barque, those men were also taken, and we returned to Charleston."

"He is a noble fellow."

Bronx smiled grimly.

"Of course, being a naval officer, he was fêted and petted, and I soon found that Sibyl had stopped her flirtation with a young artillery captain to devote herself to Moncrief, the lion of the day."

"This is not like her, my son."

"Still it is true, mother, and I was cast off."

"Not wishing to remain under Captain Hurst's command, especially as he was having his brig, the Mermaid, fitted out to present to Moncrief, I gave up my berth and determined to carry out a vessel for myself."

"I offered to buy the Mermaid, but Skipper Hurst preferred to give her to Moncrief rather than sell her to me, and as his schooner—for the cruiser belonged to him—was to sail, I bought her of him."

"You bought her, my son?"

"Yes, mother."

"What money had you, my son?"

"Well, mother, I got her, with her entire armament, stores, ammunition and fittings, for ten thousand dollars."

"It seems remarkably cheap, my son; but I know that you had but a few hundreds with you."

"True, mother, but I gave an order on our shipping merchants in New York, where you know I have some money."

"Yes, but it is cash on interest, and belongs to me, your sister and yourself together, the amount being just ten thousand."

"True, mother, but I felt that you would, with Bessie, sign an order to me for your shares when I got such a fine vessel for so small a sum, and with her privateering papers, for I have my permit from the Government as a privateer captain."

"I congratulate you, my son, and under the circumstances will, with Bessie, transfer the order to you, so that you may have it to meet your draft, which I hope will not be presented before you can arrange it with Blake & Company, as it would not otherwise be paid, you know."

"I will see them before the order gets there, mother, for I will sail for New York to-morrow."

"So soon?"

"Yes, mother, for I wish to refit my vessel and also ship a larger crew for her, as I am scant of seamen; but I will return as soon as I can."

"But, Hugh, do you think you are capable of being a commander of an armed vessel?"

"I consider that I am, mother, and my crew have perfect confidence in me," was the somewhat haughty response.

"But about Sibyl, brother?" asked Bessie.

"Oh, yes, as I was telling you, she fell in love with Moncrief, and when I urged her to become my wife she coldly dismissed me."

"I then set sail, and had not ill-fortune dogged me, would have carried several prizes into port; but I was forced to draw off from a valuable British vessel that I had captured, to fight this Bianca the Buccaneer, and my prize escaped me."

"Too bad; but you captured the pirate?"

"I would have done so had it not been for his greater speed that enabled him to escape me," was the unblushing response.

"But while on my cruise, mother, I met Moncrief in his captured brig, and I saw him signaling with British vessels, and other things happening that led me to believe he was loyal only in name to the Colonies, and at heart an Englishman."

"Upon returning to Charleston I so reported to Captain Hurst, Sibyl and others, and I was insulted grossly for my charges of treachery against Moncrief."

"That night he came into port, and I branded him as a traitor."

"But he got out of the accusation in some way, insulted me, and I challenged him."

"Oh, my son!"

"Oh, brother Hugh!"

"Well, I would not put up with everything, and I saw that Sibyl was urging him on in what he did."

"Well, we met, with swords, and neither of us was injured; and when I demanded a meeting with pistols, why upon the field came Sibyl!"

"That was unmanly in her," said Mrs. Bronx.

"I am surprised that Sibyl should do this," Bessie remarked.

"Well, she did, and so the affair ended; but one of my officers, who had seconded me, was very insulting to me, evidently bought over by Moncrief, and I ordered him on board ship.

"He refused to go, and seeing that his conduct was influencing my boat's crew to mutiny, I again ordered him aboard under penalty of death, and seeing that trouble was coming, I fired upon the man, but unfortunately the bullet missed him and killed Moncrief.

Mrs. Bronx groaned, and Bessie turned white as death, as the young privateersman uttered these words.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MIDNIGHT DEPARTURE.

HUGH BRONX could not but see how deeply his deed pained both his mother and sister, as he related it, and he understood but too well how great would be their grief, if they but knew the whole truth.

His desire was to place the skipper and Sibyl in so bad a light, and as such foes to him, that all communication would end between the two families, and, upon the return of the inmates of Hurst Haven, neither his mother or sister would go near them, or permit of a visit from them.

"Mother, my act was unavoidable, and it pains me deeply, I assure you," he said, in a sad tone.

"My son, I will not censure, for I cannot see that you are to blame, and with a human life resting upon your soul, your punishment is great; but I regret exceedingly that you are called to be so severe and to have under you men who are mutinous."

"It is the fortune of all commanders, mother."

"I suppose so; but what did you do then?"

"I was so deeply grieved that I had to be led away to my ship, and I decided to at once put to sea, and did so."

"My vessel, as I said, needs repairs, some fitting out, and I wish to ship about thirty more seamen, when I will be in a position to cruise the seas for prizes, and I will win a name that will make that false woman regret her conduct toward me."

"Try and forget her, Hugh," urged Bessie.

"Yes, my son, she is not worthy of you, and it was through her acts and words, as I understand it, that you were led into the difficulty that cost a human life at your hands; but will Captain Hurst not go to sea?"

"No, mother, for I forgot to tell you that his wound, received from his pirate brother's vessel, cost him his left arm."

"I am sorry for him, for I have always liked him; but does he remain in Charleston?"

"No, he will return here to Hurst Haven, and I suppose before long; but for my sake I beg you not to allow either him or his daughter to cross your threshold, for it will be just like them to visit you."

"My servants shall have their orders, Hugh, and neither Captain Hurst or his daughter will attempt to call a second time," said the woman, sternly.

"I am sorry, but it shall be as you wish, brother; but oh! what can have so changed Sibyl?" and tears came into Bessie's beautiful eyes.

"Now, my son, what are you to do?"

"Remain to-night, mother, with you, and early to-morrow morning, on the full tide, run out of the inlet and head for New York."

"I will see our agents, and carry your order, and Bessie's, for that money, and—"

"But was not the man you accidentally killed, my son, the one to whom you gave the order?"

"Yes, mother, but he had already received his equivalent, having negotiated it there in Charleston."

"Ah, yes, and I hope you will be in ample time to arrange the matter before the holder presents it to our agents."

"There will be no trouble about that, mother, I assure you."

"And when I get the schooner in perfect trim, I will run up here and have you and Bessie come on board and dine with me, after which I will go on my cruising to seek fame and fortune."

"But the risk is so great, Hugh."

"Oh, no, not on a privateer, you know, mother, as I can run from English cruisers and war upon merchantmen only."

"I pray the war may soon end, that you may return to us and live in peace and comfort," fervently said Mrs. Bronx, and then she left the room to see if supper was ready.

A moment after Hugh and his sister were called to the supper-room, and there had gathered to welcome him home, all the servants on the farm, having braved the stormy night to see him, when word was sent that he had returned.

In spite of the most tempting supper spread out before him, Hugh Bronx ate but little, for he seemed nervous and really wretched, and soon left the table; but until a late hour that night the three sat up talking together, and then the privateersman retired to his room.

How familiar every object seemed to him, and yet upon all seemed to rest a shadow he could not brush off.

When last in that room he had been a happy man.

Now he was wretched, crime-stained and a fugitive.

Life had seemed to him then a dream of bliss to come; but then he had never passed through any great temptation, never had to stand any great trials, and so he appeared to be strong and honorable.

But when sorely tried he had proved so weak that he went quickly downward, and his real nature developed with a rapidity that astounded him.

To and fro, to and fro he paced, clutching in one hand the orders he held, signed by his mother and sister, and waiting for the dawn to break.

At last he sat down to his little table and wrote:

"DEAR MOTHER:—"

"Thought so crowded upon me that I could not sleep, and so I slip away to my vessel, and shall put to sea, not awaiting for the morning."

"Within a short while I will return, however, and hope then to be in better mood."

"Remember that between Hurst Haven and our blood a great gulf is fixed, and that we must never cross."

"Say good-by to sis, and with love to you both, believe me, Ever your devoted son, Hugh."

This note was left upon his table, and then the man, feeling like a culprit, stole out into the hall, donned his storm-coat and hat and made his way to the shore of the inlet, where he had left the gig which he had come ashore in.

In a few moments more he was upon his deck, and though the storm still raged, the anchor was gotten up, the sails were set, and the Sea Scorpion was run through the breakers out into the open sea.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE DOWNWARD COURSE.

WITH a skill and nerve that won the admiration of his crew, Hugh Bronx ran the Sea Scorpion out through the surf and headed her for New York, hoping, with the gale then blowing, to anchor in the harbor before dawn, and in a secluded anchorage where he would not attract too much attention.

It had been his intention, after running out of Charleston as a fugitive, to head directly for New York; but he observed a spirit of discontent among his crew.

They had not taken a prize while under his command, and consequently they had received no pay, for the privateersman had spent all of his money on the repairs of the schooner in Charleston.

Provisions had run short, and the men needed clothing.

All these things Hugh Bronx had hoped to obtain through the capture of a valuable prize.

But iron, not gold, they had gotten, he had lost heavily in men, and flying to sea in a brig-of-war, flying the American flag, in hot chase, was not cheering to the men.

So it was no wonder they grumbled, and having been one of them, Hutchins had heard their grumblings and reported it to Bronx.

The men had been very much attached to Allen Rossmore, and they liked not his remaining behind.

Then those who had been at the duel with Bronx, had reported the mad act of their captain, and altogether they feared him and yet were afraid to trust him.

"Something has got to be done, cap'n, for the crew are as ugly as sharks," said Hutchins, as the schooner neared New York.

"What can be done, Hutchins?"

"Do you ask me because you wish me to tell you, cap'n?"

"Yes."

"Take a prize."

"We can find none."

"We have passed several."

"Not Englishmen?"

"No."

"Americans?"

"Yes."

"Why should I war on my own country's vessels?"

"To quiet the crew, cap'n."

"No, I will never do it."

"There'll be trouble, sir."

"It must come, then."

"Could you not raise some money to pay the men off, for if they got say, a hundred each all round, they would be satisfied."

"I have no money now."

"Could you raise it, you think, sir?"

Bronx was silent for a moment, and his face wore a troubled look.

Then it brightened up, as an idea flashed through his mind, and he said:

"Hutchins!"

"Well, sir."

"We need stores, ammunition, supplies of various kinds, and repairs done to the schooner."

"True, captain."

"It will take about three thousand dollars for all this?"

"Yes, sir; all of it."

"We have thirty-six men on board, and a hundred each will be all they need."

"Yes, sir, and give them confidence in you."

"That will make about six thousand six hundred dollars."

"Yes, sir; but better say seven thousand, for fear of accidents—such as repairs and supplies costing more."

"All right."

"Then you forget the officers, sir?"

"Why?"

"Your three mates, if you will call us so, and we would like to have a couple of hundred each—in fact, I would like to use three hundred in the city."

"I see."

"Call it eight thousand, cap'n, and it will cover all."

"Very well; I will devote that sum, for I believe I can get it," and having decided what he should do, Bronx headed for the inlet on the Long Island sea-coast near his home, and the reader has seen that he arrived and departed in safety.

As he had hoped, the schooner reached an anchorage about dawn, and it was near a shipyard on the East River.

As soon as he had breakfasted, Hugh Bronx ordered a boat alongside to go ashore in, and called to Hutchins to accompany him.

He made his way at once to the agent's office, in Water street, and Mr. Blake, the senior member, knowing him well, greeted him pleasantly, for he had often seen Hugh there with his father, and in fact within the year past.

"What can I do for you, Skipper Hugh?" he asked.

"Well, Mr. Blake, I am after money, for I have purchased a vessel, an armed schooner, have got her papers as a privateer, and am going cruising for a fortune."

"Indeed! well, if you are half the man your father was, you'll do well, my lad; but you know how we hold your money, in trust for your mother, sister and yourself conjointly, and it can only be drawn on the written orders of all three?"

"Yes, sir, I know that now, for mother told me yesterday of it; but I had given my order for ten thousand on your firm, and now revoke it, as I will draw the money myself and pay for the vessel, for here you see, I have the requisite papers," and he placed the orders of Mrs. Bronx and Bessie on the desk.

"These are all right, and when yours is placed with it, Hugh, I will send to the bank and get the money for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake, and I would like to have you for my agent, for the sale of prizes I may capture, and other business."

"Certainly, my lad, we are always willing to do business."

"And if my order comes in, you can simply say that the money was drawn out by me to pay for the vessel in cash."

"Certainly; ah! here is your order," and taking up the piece of paper which Hugh Bronx had just written on, he handed it, with the other orders, to a clerk and sent him to the bank.

In half an hour after Hugh Bronx left the office of Blake & Co., and joined Hutchins, who was awaiting him in an inn near by.

"Well, cap'n?"

"I got ten thousand," was the reply, in a tone that was meant to show how readily he could raise money.

"Holy Neptune! as quick as that?"

"Yes."

"And now you wish to order the spars and all needed for the schooner first?"

"Yes."

"Now, cap'n, suppose I tell you how to save a couple of thousand, will you go halves with me?"

"I will, Hutchins."

"You command the Scorpion, don't you?"

"I call her the Sea Scorpion."

"Yes, but she is entered on the navy register as the Scorpion."

"Yes."

"She is a regular cruiser."

"She was."

"That is what I am after, sir."

"What then?"

"Why go to the Navy Yard, tell the commandant that you are Lieutenant Hugh Bronx, commanding the American schooner-of-war, Scorpion, and that Lieutenant Moncrief sent you here to refit and get supplies with all haste while he is waiting at Charleston for you wounded, and in command of the British brig-of-war Brimstone."

"I don't see through your plan, Hutchins."

"Why, cap'n, you will have your schooner put in A No. 1 condition in half the time it could be done in a mercantile yard, and all would be charged to the Government and not cost you a cent."

"Hutchins, you have a wise head on your shoulders, and I will do it; but the crew?"

"They'll never betray you, after you have given them a hundred all round, never fear."

"I will do it, and you shall have half the cost I am saved."

"Good! now to get more men, sir."
 "Yes, we will want say forty."
 "Yes, cap'n, better have enough to work with in a tight place."
 "Then you get the men, and I'll give you five dollars each for them."
 "It's a bargain, cap'n."
 "Then now let us return on board ship and pay off the crew."

This was done, and the sight of money dispelled the clouds from the faces of the men, and checked a plot on hand to mutiny.

Hutchins told the crew to keep silent upon all subjects, except what he told them they could say, and the schooner was at once taken into the Navy Yard, and a heavy force put to work upon her.

Supplies were also ordered on board, the magazine was stored with ammunition, a complete outfit of small-arms was given, and a week after arrival the Sea Scorpion set sail in splendid trim, fully supplied in every particular, her crew numbering eighty men, all uniformed, and with Hugh Bronx having several thousand dollars in his cabin locker, and thus feeling himself rich and to be envied, with such a fine cruiser under his command.

As the schooner swept out of the East River, and rounded Governor's Island, Hugh Bronx saw Hutchins give a sudden start.

"What is it?" he cried, excitedly.
 "Do you see those three vessels down near the Narrows?"

"Yes."
 "Don't you recognize the Brimstone, the captured schooner and the barque, sir?"
 "By Heaven! you are right, and they are coming up to the city."

"Sure, cap'n."
 "What is to be done?"

"They cannot recognize us here, among these other sail, so put about, head through Hell Gate out into the Sound, and thence around Montauk into the sea."

"I'll do it," and the vessel was at once put about and headed up the East River toward Hell Gate. Hugh Bronx muttering aloud, as he nervously paced the deck:

"Once I get into deep water I will win a name and send in so many prizes, the Government will overlook any little irregularities I may have been guilty of."

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WOUNDED LIEUTENANT.

WHEN the young officer commanding the brig-of-war Brimstone, saw that they were to be caught in a calm, he felt that the chances were in favor of the schooner's escape, as he expected she would get a breeze first.

Then Allen Rossmore had asked to take the boats and carry her by boarding, and it had been granted, so that the boats were lowered and filled with men.

As they discovered that the schooner was using her sweeps, a hot fire was opened, and the boats, in the face of the coming storm, were forced to put back, so that the Sea Scorpion, as the reader has seen, made her escape.

The brig, however, when the storm struck her, held on, hoping to find the schooner, but when dawn came and no trace of her was visible, it was decided to put back to port.

Having ably done the duties devolving upon him, Allen Rossmore was asked by Lieutenant Roe to remain on board the brig and assist him for the present, an invitation the young man accepted with pleasure.

"I wish you would go ashore, Mr. Rossmore, and find out how Lieutenant Moncrief is," the officer had said to Rossmore, as soon as the anchor was dropped.

Calling the gig alongside, Rossmore entered it and started for the landing of the White mansion.

Captain Bainbridge, who was aiding as a nurse for Moncrief, saw the return of the Brimstone, and he was about to go down to meet the gig, which he saw approaching, when he beheld Sibyl in the river arbor awaiting it, so he refrained from going, for since he had become convinced that his love for her was hopeless of return, he wished to shun her all in his power, great as was the temptation for him to be with her.

As the gig reached the shore and Rossmore sprung to land, he was met by Sibyl, who, after greeting him pleasantly, said:

"You did not catch the schooner?"
 "No, Miss Sibyl; but I will tell you after I know if Lieutenant Moncrief is better."

"He is better, and Surgeon Bennett says if inflammation does not set in he has strong hopes that he will recover."

"I am glad to hear this, indeed, as all will be on board ship."

"Lads, you heard what Miss Hurst said?" and Rossmore turned to the coxswain and four oarsmen in the gig.

"Yes, sir, and we are glad to hear it," answered the coxswain.

"Now, Miss Sibyl, we were gaining upon the schooner when a calm caught us."

"I went in the boats to attack her, when she got out sweeps and pulled away from us, and a

storm drove us back to the brig, so she escaped."

"I heard firing."
 "Yes, we opened on her, but she paid no heed to it."

"Then Captain Bronx has outlawed himself by his act?"

"It would seem so, Miss Sibyl."

"And what is your intention, Mr. Rossmore?"

"Lieutenant Roe has asked me to remain on board and assist him, for the brig has lost several officers in action of late, you know, a lieutenant is on the schooner-of-war that was captured, a midshipman has charge of the barque, and the captain's being now wounded, cramps Lieutenant Roe for aid."

"I am glad of this, Mr. Rossmore, for your sake, and when Lieutenant Moncrief is better, I shall have father ask him to extend to you the offer he made to that most unworthy man, Hugh Bronx."

"Will you go up and report to the major, and also see Surgeon Bennett, who can tell you just how Lieutenant Moncrief is?"

Rossmore decided to do so, and was ushered into the library by Sibyl, where sat Major White, Captain Bainbridge and Skipper Hurst.

They all greeted the young sailor kindly, and heard his story of the unsuccessful chase of the schooner.

Then Captain Bainbridge led him up-stairs to the room of Surgeon Bennett, who gave him strong assurances that Moncrief would pull through all right, and in a few days the crisis would be passed.

Happy in the thought that he had made friends out of those who had appeared as foes before, on account of his connection with Hugh Bronx, Rossmore returned on board the Brimstone with a happy heart, and when his report of Moncrief's condition was made to the crew, they broke forth in three ringing cheers.

Major White had told him to also say to Lieutenant Roe that it was best for him to go on with the work of fitting the vessels out, and arming the Sea Siren, just as Lieutenant Moncrief had determined to do.

The men were at once set to work with a will to get the barque, schooner-of-war and Brimstone in readiness to sail when the Sea Siren departed for New York.

CHAPTER XLV.

OUTLAWED.

AFTER several weeks it was seen that Lieutenant Moncrief could not be able to depart for a month or more, though he was improving rapidly, and all danger was past, so it was decided, in a council held in his rooms, at which the port captain, Major Perry White, Skipper Hurst, and Lieutenant Roe were present, that it would be best to send the prizes on to the Navy Department for Government use.

The barque was a fine vessel and a fast sailer, and could be readily made into a cruiser, while the captured schooner was in good condition to be used as such.

The Brimstone, which had been depleted of her best guns for the Sea Siren, could have her armament made complete at the Government yards, and would be a most valuable acquisition for the navy.

The port captain made his report, the major added his, and the highest praise was bestowed upon Moncrief.

Then it was requested that the admiral commandant should appoint Allen Rossmore a lieutenant in the navy, he being in every way fitted for the rank and worthy of the honor.

The young sailor was to go on in command of the barque, and was to then return with the crew of the Sea Siren, who were divided among the three vessels for the run north.

So it was that the three vessels set sail one night for New York, and, short-handed as they were, the brig but half-armed, the bark with only a show of strength, and the schooner-of-war with only a third of a crew, it was decided to keep close together during the voyage, so as to present a formidable look to any large British cruisers they might meet.

The result of this strategy was that an English sloop-of-war sighted gave them a wide berth, and a ship-of-the-line seemed not at all anxious to try conclusions with three formidable looking vessels, and New York Harbor was entered in safety.

Running up close to the Government yards the anchors were let fall, and Lieutenant Roe, Rossmore, and the officer commanding the schooner went ashore to report their arrival, and the former to deliver the dispatches and other important papers that he bore.

The admiral received them most graciously, and was immensely pleased to learn of the safe arrival of the Mermaid, and the capture of the barque, especially with her most useful cargo.

He went on board the brig, the schooner, and the barque, pronounced them first-class vessels, and complimented Moncrief, his officers and men in the highest terms.

"As you say that Moncrief prefers to command his new vessel, the Sea Siren, I will raise you to a first lieutenant, Mr. Roe, and give you the brig Brimstone, promoting also this officer here, Mr. Flemming, and leaving him in com-

mand of the schooner, and you can get your outfit and crews here."

"This gentleman, Mr. Rossmore, as Moncrief earnestly requests it, I will make an officer of his schooner, the Sea Siren, and, as more supplies must be sent South, he can take them on the barque with the Sea Siren's crew, and by that time Captain Moncrief will be able to sail, I hope."

"Then he is to be captain?" eagerly asked Rossmore.

"Yes, sir; you will carry back his commission as such, for these three prizes would have won it for him, if nothing else."

And the delighted faces of the three young officers proved to the admiral how popular Moncrief was as a commander.

"You will hear from Captain Moncrief, sir. I assure you, for the Sea Siren is the fleetest craft afloat, as she escorted us out to sea when we left, with a junior lieutenant and twenty men on board, and she walked away from us, admiral, as though we were at anchor, and we were under a press of canvas and she had not her topsails set," said Lieutenant Roe.

"We have heard of Moncrief ever since he commanded a craft, and his name of the Dashing Privateersman was well won; but how about the fellow Bronx, of whom you speak?"

"Tell me all you know about him?"

"Mr. Rossmore can tell you better, sir," said Roe.

Thus referred to, Allen Rossmore said:
 "He was mate on the Mermaid, now the Sea Siren, admiral, Captain Hurst making his daughter Sibyl, whom we all call the Siren of the Sea, his first mate, for she is well able to command and navigate a vessel, and really saved the brig when we were chased by Bianca the Buccaneer, and her father was, as we believed, mortally wounded."

"Bronx belongs to a good family living on the coast, and they are well-to-do, his father having been a sea-captain."

"Hugh is a good sailor, but has a temper that is ugly in the extreme, and outside of that the men liked him, and suspected no harm of him."

"But, from the day of the chase by Bianca, he developed a new nature, and after arriving at Charleston he seemed to hate everybody he came in contact with."

"His attempted rescue of the Scorpion, and capture, his purchase of the schooner and sailing as a privateersman, and all that followed, you have there, sir, in Captain Moncrief's reports, along with those of the port captain and Major White's."

"He seemed to feel a deeper antipathy for Captain Moncrief than for any one else, and I was sent with his challenge to that officer, after the affair of our being so cleverly saved by the ruse of the signals to the British sloop."

"He accused Captain Moncrief of treachery, and—"

"He was the traitor!" grimly said the admiral.

"Yes, sir, it seems so; but his accusation was replied to in a manner that he took as an insult, and hence the challenge, the result of which you know, sir."

"And the scamp never came to when you fired on him, Roe?"

"No, sir, and it is lucky for him he did not, for I could not control my men, and they would have swung him up to the yard-arm."

"Egad, it would have been an easy settlement of his case; but then of course we cannot countenance disobedience in a crew."

"And then he came to New York, you said, admiral?"

"Yes, Mr. Roe, and represented himself as lieutenant commanding the Scorpion, Captain Moncrief as laid up with a wound, and that he had come in to repair ship, add to his crew and supplies."

"I gave him a *carte blanche* order, and he got about thirty-five hundred dollars out of us, and then put to sea in perfect trim only yesterday."

"I hope he will do something to retrieve himself," said Rossmore.

"He can do nothing, for his wounding Moncrief as you say, his flight, refusing to come to when you fired upon him, and coming to this port and fitting out under false pretenses, render him unfit for the service as a privateersman, and he is an outlaw."

"An outlaw, admiral?"

"Yes, Mr. Roe, and I shall give to Moncrief the no doubt cheerful task of capturing him wherever he finds him, while you too can do the same."

"But did he pay Moncrief for his vessel?"

"He gave him an order, sir, for ten thousand dollars on Blake & Co., his agents, of New York, and Captain Moncrief put it in my hands to collect," said Allen Rossmore.

"Ten thousand! why Moncrief gave him the craft, for she was worth, as she was armed and fitted out, five times that sum."

"But I warrant the order is no account," said the angry admiral.

"I think it is, sir."

"Then go and see, Mr. Rossmore, and I will await your return."

Allen Rossmore departed from the admiral's quarters, but in half an hour he was back again.

"Well, sir?"

"Mr. Blake said that Bronx had drawn the money himself, intending to pay the cash to the captain, as he stated."

"I told you so; and mark my words, Moncrief will never see a dollar for his vessel until he recaptures her, so we will leave the work to him to do, young gentleman."

The admiral then told Allen Rossmore to hold himself ready to return in about two weeks, and that the cargo of the barque should be gotten ready by that time.

The other two vessels were ordered to be gotten ready for sea, and then the three young officers departed from the quarters of the old admiral, elated over their good fortune, yet pained at the brand of outlawry which Hugh Bronx had brought upon himself.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SEA SIREN SETS SAIL.

THE barque sailed at the allotted time, and the crew of the Sea Siren were on board and Allen Rossmore in command, proud of his position as lieutenant, and delighted to be the bearer of a captain's commission to Manton Moncrief.

With such a crew the barque was superbly manned, and the admiral had ordered her armed with a battery to protect her against any ordinary foe.

There was on board, besides, a regular crew, with an officer to command her on the return after she had delivered her cargo at Charleston, so that she would prove a dangerous adversary to any small cruiser she might meet.

But Allen Rossmore knew that he was to take no risks, so headed at once for Charleston, determined to press on with all sail, as his freight was too valuable to detain by the way, or lose, in trying to act as a vessel-of-war.

"So, after a very rapid run, he swept up the harbor one day, saluting the forts and dropping anchor near the Government dock.

Captain Bainbridge had recognized the vessel, and Rossmore on her deck, and met him as he landed.

"Welcome back, Mr. Rossmore," he said, pleasantly.

"I am glad to get back, sir, and especially as I bring good news, for our armies have been victorious of late in the Northern Colonies, and I bring a cargo that will be welcome to our troops in the Carolinas; but how is Captain Moncrief?"

"I may say well, for he walks about now, and is gaining strength daily.

"But come, we will go to the mansion at once, and you will have a warm welcome."

And a warm welcome did Rossmore get indeed, from one and all, and they listened attentively to his story of all that had happened and congratulated him upon the rank he had attained, while Moncrief fairly blushed under the warm congratulations showered upon him.

"And so poor Bronx has been outlawed?" said Captain Hurst, who was quite himself again, with the exception of having but one arm.

"Yes, sir."

"I regret it exceedingly on account of his poor mother and sister," the skipper returned.

"Yes, Heaven help them; but Hugh brought it upon himself," Sibyl said.

"You say that he went into New York harbor and fitted the Scorpion out at Government expense?" Moncrief asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And drew the money that was there to meet my order?"

"So Blake & Co. said, sir."

"Well, he is welcome to the schooner, if he will put her to a good use, but I almost doubt it," and Moncrief looked pained that his pretty craft should be devoted to other than a good cause, for he cared nothing for the money.

"I wonder if he will turn pirate?" said Surgeon Bennett, who still remained at the mansion near his patient, at the urgent request of Major White.

"If he is outlawed, he is really no better than a pirate now," Major White said, and Captain Moncrief, having opened his special orders, remarked: "Here are orders for me to capture Hugh Bronx, Fugitive Privateersman and outlaw, and hang him without trial."

"I regret this exceedingly."

The words fell like a pall upon all, and every eye was upon the young captain.

"You will have to obey orders, captain, bitter as it is, for it is indeed a painful thing to have to put the noose about the neck of one whom we have known and called friend, believing him to be such," Major White said.

"Yes, I shall obey my orders; in fact, were he my brother, I would not shrink if my Government ordered me to do it," was the low reply.

Again a silence fell upon the group, broken at last by Moncrief, who said:

"Lieutenant Rossmore, I wish you to get the crew on board the Sea Siren, and have all in readiness for sailing ten days from to-day, and you are to be my first officer."

"I thank you, Captain Moncrief."

"You will be satisfied with that date for sailing, Captain Hurst, you and Miss Sibyl?"

"Yes, sir, for I think we have taxed the hospitality of our host for a great while."

"I only wish I had you with me always, my friends, for Mrs. White has not been as well in two years, as during your stay," the major replied.

"Yes, and I shall miss you all greatly, in fact the house will be as lonesome as a graveyard without you," responded Mrs. White.

So it was arranged that the Sea Siren should sail within ten days, and that she might go out to sea as slippery as an eel, she was drawn out upon the ways and her hull made as smooth as glass.

Then she was put in perfect trim from keel to truck, her crew of eighty men donned their new uniforms, and all was in readiness to receive her captain.

Two days before sailing he went on board, and the morning she was to depart Captain Hurst and Sibyl took possession of their luxurious state-rooms, for the skipper had spared no expense in making the cabin of the Sea Siren like a *bijou* palace in all its appointments and furnishings.

"This is fine enough to suit the tastes of an Algerine corsair," said Captain Moncrief, when he first entered the cabin and looked about him.

Farewells were then said, the anchor was hauled up, sail spread, while the cheerful sea songs of the crew filled the air.

Like a snow-cloud the Sea Siren darted down the harbor, saluted by the forts, cheered by the populace that lined the banks, and her guns ringing forth an answering salute.

"That craft sails like the wind," said Major White to Robert Bainbridge, as the two stood upon the parapet of the fort watching her fade away in the distance.

"She is well named, sir," was the reply of the young captain, whose face wore an expression of deep sadness, for the Sea Siren carried away his heart, and Sibyl the siren knew it, though the gallant soldier had never breathed his love to her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE NIGHT CHASE.

"DOES her change of rig improve her sailing, think you, Captain Hurst?" asked Manton Moncrief, when the Sea Siren had been a few hours at sea.

"Immensely, I am sure, and what is more, she will be a better rough weather boat, go to windward several points closer, and I am sure be superior in every respect," answered the skipper.

"She seems to fairly fly," Sibyl said, admiringly.

The Sea Siren was carrying full sail, though a lower sail breeze, for most vessels, was blowing, and she was cutting through the water at a rate that won the admiration of her crew, who watched her with the greatest pride and interest.

They saw that she stood up well under the great pressure of the wind, that there was no "bone in her teeth," as she cut the waters with her sharp prow like a razor, and that she did not, under heavy gusts, get her lee scuppers under.

She was also a dry boat forward, though the sea was very rough, and her wake was clean and even.

To try the vessel more, Moncrief pointed her into the very eye of the wind, and yet she forged ahead well with her sheets as flat as a board.

Then he jibed her, and she stood it without a lurch to her scuppers, while before the wind she went along, wing and wing like the very wind itself.

"There is no point of sailing that she is not good on, Captain Hurst," said Moncrief, warming up with enthusiasm, after he had practiced with her for a couple of hours upon every course, and saw that she also went about as though she was upon a pivot.

So delighted were the crew with her, that when relieved from duty they gave her captain three cheers, then three for the schooner, and ended up with three for Sibyl, the fair siren for whom she was named.

The wind held good, and the third night out the lookout called from aloft:

"Sail ho!"

It was a beautiful night, and several hours after sunset, and the stranger was under full sail, coming up on the starboard bow, and heading so as to cross the bows of the Sea Siren.

It was soon descried to be a large schooner, and Moncrief said in a low tone:

"With Miss Sibyl on board, Captain Hurst, I will run from that fellow, for he is surely armed or he would not be in these waters."

"No, Captain Moncrief, my daughter is not one to stand in the way of your duty, sir, so hold on as you are, and if the stranger is a British cruiser you think you can capture, fight him," was the plucky reply.

"I will make him show at least whether he is a lamb or a wolf, for I have a pivot-gun forward that has not its superior on any line-of-battle

ship," answered Moncrief, and then he called out:

"Forward, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Lieutenant Rossmore, clear that Forecastle Pet for action, and toss a shot over that fellow."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The gun was quickly loaded, and belched forth its fiery flame and iron.

All watched attentively, and the crash of timbers, accompanied by cries, followed.

"Who fired that gun?" called out Moncrief, as Sibyl, hearing the shot, came running on deck from the cabin.

"I did, sir," was the reply.

"You are a superb shot, Lieutenant Rossmore, but I hope she is not an American; but we will know soon."

All waited for a moment, and it was seen that the stranger suddenly changed his course and began to fly.

"Show our naval secret signals, Mr. Rossmore!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the answer, and it was done.

"No, she is not of our navy, so try your hand again, Mr. Rossmore."

The gun was again fired, and again was heard the crash, showing that the aim had been true.

"If you can do that a third time, Rossmore, I'll say you are the best cannon shot afloat," cried Moncrief, and a third time the gun was fired.

A moment of deathlike stillness, then cries and crashing timber, and a wild cheer broke from the crew of the Sea Siren.

"I give you the palm, Rossmore, as a dead shot; but cease firing, as the craft may be one of our privateers, though she should show her private signals, that we might know it."

As Moncrief spoke there came a flash from the stern of the chase, but the shot fell short.

Then the vessel rounded sharply and gave the Sea Siren a broadside; but these too fell into the sea before reaching her.

"That is a marvelous gun, Captain Moncrief, that you have there," said Rossmore, coming aft.

"Yes, it is a wonder at long range, and I had it on board the Sea Scorpion with me."

"But yonder fellow is running well, and we will follow in his wake until daylight, when we will make him show his colors and fight us."

"He sails well, sir," said the skipper.

"He has all set that will draw, father, and we have not sent up our topsails," responded Sibyl.

"And we are gaining rapidly enough," was the reply of Moncrief, and he continued:

"I shall still shorten sail if we creep up much closer, for I wish to have a look at him by day, and, as he is sailing our way, it is all right."

And soon, as the Sea Siren showed an anxiety to overhaul the chase too rapidly, the mainsail had a reef put in her, which held her about an equal rate of sailing with the stranger.

Retiring to his cabin, Moncrief left Rossmore in command of the deck, with orders to call him at daybreak.

This was done, and when the young captain ascended to the deck, he saw the sea growing bright under the approach of day.

His first glance was at the chase, and he saw that the Siren crept up nearer, though no more sail had been set upon her; and the schooner ahead was covered with canvas and lay well over as she drove along.

"Ah, Miss Sibyl, you up so soon?" he asked, as he saw the young girl standing near.

"Yes, Captain Moncrief, like you, I had a desire to see that vessel by daylight," was the answer.

"Will you have my glass?"

"What do you make of her?"

"See for yourself if I am right," and she smiled, and a strange smile it was.

He leveled the glass and almost instantly said:

"It is the Scorpion."

Then he turned quickly and gave orders to change the course of the Sea Siren, to the great surprise of the crew; but when the dawn grew brighter many of the old crew of the Scorpion recognized her, and they wondered more at the strange act of their commander.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FAIR PILOT.

WHATEVER those on the Sea Scorpion might have thought of the strange conduct of a vessel, which they could not but see it was in the power of to overhaul them, and yet drew off, it was certainly a surprise to the crew of the Sea Siren, and the talk in low tones about it.

But an old seaman at last set the matter at rest by saying:

"Shipmates, there is a mighty pretty ledgy on board o' this craft, and the cap'n looks on her as an angel, and I guesses she is, and as he has orders to capture the Sea Scorpion and hang her skipper, he don't want no fight, nor no yard-arm and noose work, while Miss Sibyl are on board, so he jist bides his time, yer see."

They all did seem to see that this was the case and thought no more of it.

But that afternoon Sibyl came on deck, and

seeing Captain Moncrief leaning over the taffrail, stepped up to him and said in a low tone:

"Will you tell me something, if I ask you?"

"Certainly, Miss Sibyl."

"Why did you draw off from the Sea Scorpion this morning, as soon as you recognized her?"

"Miss Sibyl?"

"Yes?"

"Had I held on a fight would have followed, and a sea combat is an ugly sight for a lady's eyes."

"You should not have thought of me."

"But I did."

"Was that your only motive?"

"No."

"Tell me the other."

"Well, my orders are to capture Bronx, and hang him without trial to the yard-arm."

"Now a battle between the Sea Scorpion and the Sea Siren could end but one way."

"And that way?"

"By the capture of the Sea Scorpion of course, though Bronx would doubtless fight with desperation."

"He would."

"Once he became my prisoner I would have to obey orders."

"Well?"

"And hang him."

"And you shrink from it?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"Well, he was your friend."

"He is so no longer."

"You are the friend of his mother and sister."

"Ah, yes, and I pity them."

"So do I, and I wish that some one else than I might be his captor."

"You have a good heart, Manton Moncrief."

"You are kind to say so, Miss Sibyl."

She made no reply, and soon after walked away.

The next day at night came a severe gale set in.

The course of the Sea Siren lay for Long Island, the skipper desiring to return home as soon as possible, and Moncrief had promised to run into the inlet and spend several days at Hurst Haven, for he was not yet wholly strong, and he knew the rest would benefit him, not to speak of the delight he had in being near Sibyl.

"You say you channel is a bad one to run, Miss Sibyl, in a blow?" asked Moncrief.

"Yes, sir, but it can be done with proper care."

"We will not be there, you know, until after nightfall."

"So I see."

"Then we had better stand off and on until daylight, and then run in."

"By no means."

"You know your father has but one arm now, and as a pilot he—"

"I will be your pilot, Captain Moncrief."

"You?"

"Yes, why not?"

"True, your father has said you were as good a sailor as he is and I believe it; but will you dare attempt the inlet to-night?"

"Certainly, for the wind is abeam and this vessel works to a charm."

"You will have no light-house you know to guide you."

"I can go in by the sound of the surf, and by watching the breakers, which are wilder in the inlet."

"The vessel is in your hands for the trial, Miss Sibyl."

"You honor me with your confidence, I assure you," but do you see yonder mansion on the hill?" and she pointed two leagues away to the shore.

"Yes."

"That is Hurst Haven."

He turned his glass upon it, and after a long look, said:

"It is a grand mansion, truly."

"It is a dear old home, and I love it; but see! it is just growing dark, and you will see a light stream out from the tower on the east wing of Hurst Haven, for father has given orders for it to be lit every night, as a beacon to some poor mariner—"

"Ah! there it is," and afar off was visible the light.

It was an ugly night, for the seas ran wild, and the winds howled over the schooner as they sped on with terrific speed.

The skipper soon came on deck, and glancing about him, recognized the Hurst Haven beacon, for he said cheerily:

"Home again!"

"But a dangerous inlet to pass through before reaching an anchorage, Captain Hurst," said Moncrief.

"Oh! Sibyl will pilot you through all right," was the reply.

"Then she is a fine pilot to do so on such a night."

"That is just what she is, Captain Moncrief, as you will see."

In a few moments after he said, in a low tone:

"Now don't say anything to her, and see if she does not know what she is about."

Half an hour after, as though to verify her father's words, Sibyl said:

"Captain Moncrief, you mean for me to be your pilot, do you not?"

"Yes, Miss Sibyl."

"You do not fear to trust the schooner and the lives of your crew in my hands?"

"By no means, and throw my life in the balance," he said, with a smile.

"Then please put another reef in the foresail, and shake a reef out of the mainsail, for she will work quicker."

The orders were given and promptly executed.

"I will head now directly for the inlet, for we are opposite to it."

"You have a good eye to know that, Miss Sibyl."

"I tell by the beacon at Hurst Haven, as it now lies, and the small light you see dead ahead."

"Ah, yes! I see it, and it appears to be in the window of some house."

"That light is in the sitting-room of Hugh Bronx's home."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and now I want two of your best men to take the wheel with me."

"There are no better than the two now there, Miss Sibyl."

"Then into the inlet we go," was the cheery reply, and she took her stand to the right of the starboard wheelmen.

"Steady as you are, men!"

"Steady 'tis," was the reply.

"Head so that one of you keeps the bowsprit to starboard of that light, the other to larboard."

Thus the Sea Siren drove on, until the roar of the surf was appalling.

But the fair pilot never moved, and the schooner was soon burying her sharp prows in the wild breakers.

"Starboard hard!" cried Sibyl, as the breakers were even with the stern of the schooner, and quickly came the response:

"Starboard hard 'tis!"

The sharp bows seemed drowned for a moment; as they swung around, but the Sea Siren went flying along for a dozen lengths ere another order was given.

Then came:

"Starboard hard!"

"Starboard hard 'tis!"

"Steady as you are!"

"Steady 'tis!"

Again the schooner held on, for a cable's length, and then came:

"Hard! hard a-larboard!"

"Hard a-larboard 'tis."

An instant the bows swung rapidly, and then were brought to a steady, and the schooner shot ahead in the still water, for she had passed in through the inlet and was in the little haven beyond the sandy stretch of beach which kept at bay the mighty ocean.

Gliding on for a quarter of a mile the sail was taken in, the anchor let go and the Sea Siren was in a haven of safety, brought there by the fair pilot, Sibyl Hurst.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE REBUFF.

It was still early in the evening, when the Sea Siren dropped anchor in the cove, and Captain Hurst decided to go home at once, as it was but a short distance up through the woods.

A boat was lowered at once, and the father, daughter and Moncrief were set on shore and Sibyl led the way up to the mansion.

The baying of a dog greeted them, but a shrill call from Sibyl changed his angry bark into a yelp of greeting and a huge mastiff came bounding toward them.

The servants in the kitchen also heard the signal, and recognized it, and the door was thrown open and a joyous welcome given them.

Lights were flashed in the mansion windows, fires were built, for the night was raw, and the old cook set to work to prepare a substantial supper.

Moncrief gazed about him with silent delight.

It was just such a home as he had pictured what home should be, but which he had never known, as, from boyhood he had followed the sea.

The rooms were large, elegantly furnished, and thick carpets were on the floors.

A charming room was placed at his disposal, a huge wood fire crackled upon the hearth, and sinking into an easy-chair he began to build castles in the coals and became lost to the present until the skipper came to call him to supper.

And such a supper as the three sat down to Moncrief had only imagined there might be but never enjoyed, while the skipper had brought out of his cellar a bottle or two of his choicest wine.

It might have been the surroundings, perhaps the pretty dress, which Sibyl had hastily put on, for the one she had worn on the schooner was wet with spray, but certain it is that Manton Moncrief mentally took oath that he had

never seen her look half as beautiful, or appear as fascinating.

It was midnight before they said good-night, and sinking into a downy bed Manton Moncrief soon sunk to sleep and dreamt that he was in Eden.

The next morning after a hearty breakfast the skipper set about showing him his splendid farm, and returning by the shore they boarded the schooner, when the young sailor was surprised and pleased to find that Sibyl had sent to his crew the greatest quantity of milk, fresh butter, eggs, fowls, vegetables and all kinds of good things to tempt the palate, while the officers were invited to dine at Hurst Haven that day, though they had not been forgotten in the supplies.

"Leave the boatswain in command, Moncrief, and let all your officers come, for Sibyl has set her heart on it, and to-morrow we will give the men a dinner ashore in the woods," said the skipper.

Moncrief could refuse nothing, and so it was decided that Allen Rossmore and his junior officers should dine at Hurst Haven at two o'clock that day.

Having gotten all going right in the household, Sibyl mounted her horse, determined to ride over and see Bessie Bronx and her mother.

She did not suppose that Hugh had been home, and more, if he had, that he had breathed one word that would reflect upon herself.

She loved Mrs. Bronx and Bessie dearly, and she was determined that the shortcomings of the son and brother should not stand in the way of their friendship.

Entering the gateway, Sibyl rode up to the piazza, but seeing no one, dismounted and walked in through the open hall door.

Tapping at the door which she knew led into the sitting-room, the answer came from within:

"Come in!"

She knew the voice.

It was that of Mrs. Bronx, and she quickly entered.

Mrs. Bronx was a woman of fine appearance, though a trifle cold and haughty in manner.

She idolized her children, had few friends, was lenient with them but very firm with her servants.

She was an ambitious woman, and had lived in the hope that Sibyl Hurst would one day be the wife of her son, for she knew her to be an heiress. She was beautiful, refined and educated, while not a word could be said against her.

She was reading a paper as Sibyl entered, and looked up at the opening of the door.

Her face paled as she recognized the maiden, who advanced toward her in her pleasantest way, saying:

"My dear Mrs. Bronx, I am so glad to see you once more, and I hope you and Bessie are well."

Sibyl paused, for the woman had drawn herself up to her full height, her face was white and her eyes flashed, while she stepped back and said sharply:

"Miss Hurst, I believe?"

"Why, Mrs. Bronx, do you not know me?" cried Sibyl, in alarm.

"I knew one once by the name of Sibyl Hurst, and believed her to be a noble girl."

"I have found her to be a fickle, false, heartless and treacherous, and I despise her!"

The words seemed to come in a hiss from the woman's lips.

Sibyl was appalled, and seemed to feel that the lady had lost her mind.

"My poor Mrs. Bronx, you are ill, for I am Sibyl Hurst, and I love you very dearly," she said.

As she spoke, Sibyl advanced toward her, but the woman drew back, and said sternly:

"Do not come near me, girl, but leave my house at once, for you are not worthy to be beneath its roof!"

The eyes of the maiden flashed fire at this, and it seemed to dawn upon her that if Mrs. Bronx was insane there was method in her madness; and she said, in her cool, cutting way:

"My dear madam, I shall leave your house at once, nor will I ever do you the honor to step foot into it again."

"Anger I do not feel for you, but pity—pity that you should be the mother of Hugh Bronx, now a fugitive upon the seas."

The words were stinging, the manner so calm, so cutting, that Mrs. Bronx shrunk back before the awful anger of the girl whom she had so insulted.

But at the allusion to her son, she cried in a voice of frenzy:

"No, no, no! you dare not say aught against my noble boy—he whose heart you have broken!"

"I say nothing that is not true, and as for a heart, he has none to break."

"I bid you farewell, madam."

Wheeling majestically, Sibyl drew her riding-habit about her superb form, and strode from the room and the house.

Her horse awaited her, and springing into the saddle, she rode home at a rapid gallop.

To her father and Moncrief she related what had occurred, for her angry face caused them

to feel that something had gone wrong and questioned her, and the young sailor said in his kindly way:

"Do not feel anger against a mother who defends her son, Miss Sibyl, for the truth is, Hugh Bronx has been home and told his story and it is believed."

"God help her then, and I am sorry I said what I did, and I will write to Bessie soon and tell her how sorry I am."

Then Sibyl left the piazza to dress for dinner, and when the officers arrived every trace of what had happened had faded away, and a most enjoyable dinner was had that long lingered in the remembrance of those who sat down to it.

CHAPTER I.

FOLLOWING A LIFE SKIFF.

It was not a very hard matter to persuade Manton Moncrief to spend a few days longer as the guest of Hurst Haven.

The picnic dinner in the woods had been given to the crew, and they enjoyed it to their hearts and stomachs' content.

Then too the skipper kept their men supplied daily with fresh meats, poultry and vegetables from his farm, and had their captain wished to strip the ship and go into winter-quarters in the cove the crew would have been content.

As he wished to return at will, by day or night when his cruising would bring him near the coast, Moncrief set about learning the channel in and out of the cove, through the inlet, where the surf constantly broke with savage force.

In a life-skiff belonging to Sibyl, and with that young lady for a pilot, he ran in and out several times a day until he was able to make the trip without a word from her, even after nightfall.

Then he tried a five-ton pleasure sloop that belonged to the farm, and this also he ran through with perfect success.

Getting up sail he then ran the schooner in and out, and as it was growing dark he tried it again under cover of the night until he was convinced that he could, come in, as Sibyl had, in a gale.

He had instructed Allen Rossmore to also learn the channel, and the young man was taking soundings, drawing a chart and doing all in his power to obey orders, without instructions from so sweet a pilot as had Moncrief for a teacher.

The Sabbath day coming with the Sea Siren was in the cove. Moncrief and Surgeon Bennett, who was also a guest at Hurst Haven, drove with the skipper and Sibyl to attend the church at the meeting-house some miles inland.

The humble church goers of the island gazed upon Moncrief with admiration, for it had become noised about the neighborhood that the famous Dashing Privateer captain was at Hurst Haven, and many crowded around the skipper after service was over to converse with him on the loss of his arm, to get a word and a smile from Sibyl, and an introduction to the young sailor whose fame had preceded him.

Sibyl had seen Bessie Bronx at church, her mother not being present, and had tried to speak to her, but saw that she evidently shunned her.

On the way home they passed the Bronx carriage, and Sibyl bowed low and half gave an order to the coachman to stop the vehicle that she might speak with her.

But the cold, haughty stare of Bessie Bronx repulsed her, and the Hurst carriage rolled on. "That was the sister of Hugh Bronx, and you see that she refused to notice my bow."

"Now I have done with all of them, though I pity them," she said to Moncrief.

"She is very beautiful," said the surgeon.

"Yes, very lovely in face," Moncrief added.

"She is, and as lovely in character also, and I have dearly loved her; but then Hugh has maligned me to his mother and sister, I am sure, and so let it rest until they see their error."

As Captain Moncrief had ordered all in readiness to sail on Monday, Lieutenant Allan Rossmore determined to improve the Sabbath afternoon by running in and out of the inlet a few more times in practice.

The day had come on to be raw and windy after noon, and the sea being rough the waves were unusually high, but he thought that a better opportunity to try his skill through the fierce surf, so sailed away from the schooner in the life-skiff.

The Sea Siren was anchored in a curve of the cove, protected from view from the sea by a wooded point of land, and so the young officer soon lost sight of the vessel.

As he stood out into the bay he saw a boat shoot out from the shore a quarter of a mile below and immediately opposite to the inlet.

He knew that there lay the boat-house of the Bronx farm, and having seen no one there during the schooner's stay in the cove, he turned his glass upon the boat to discover who was its occupant.

To his surprise he saw that it was not a man, but a young girl.

"That is Hugh's sister I have heard so much about, and they say, as a sailor, she is only second to Sibyl Hurst," he muttered.

"She is searching for the inlet, surely; but what can be taking her out to sea such a day as this, and Sunday afternoon, too."

"I will follow her, for she trifles with life to go out through that mad surf."

The skiff with Bessie Bronx in it held straight on, and the pretty pilot looked neither to the right or left, so did not see the skiff containing Rossmore following her.

Into the surf she dashed, and Allen Rossmore held his breath until he saw her little sail far out beyond the dashing breakers.

"I will go yonder and land," he muttered, and he ran into a nook, sheltered by an arm of sand, but almost in the surf that surged through the open inlet.

Landing, he made his boat fast, and ascending to the top of one of the sand dunes, he looked over in search of the skiff.

An exclamation arose to his lips, for off-shore, just coming to, and with the skiff in which was Bessie Bronx heading directly for it, was the Sea Scorpion!

CHAPTER LI.

A FOE IN THE WAY.

THERE was no doubt of it, there lay the Sea Scorpion, half a league off-shore, and she had just come to at a signal from Bessie Bronx.

"I will watch events," muttered Rossmore, and he lay down on the sand dune and looked out through the long grass that grew on the top.

The little skiff had signaled the schooner, and the latter had at once come to.

Running alongside, Bessie Bronx was drawn on board by her brother and at once led to the cabin.

Hugh Bronx was pale and looked haggard, while he seemed ill at ease.

"Well, sis, what on earth brings you out here in this blow?" and there was anxiety portrayed in the question.

"When I returned from church I sighted your schooner coming along the coast, and hurried out to meet you, before you got beyond the woods where you would be seen from Hurst Haven."

"And why, sis?"

"Well, there are visitors at Hurst Haven."

"Visitors?"

"Yes, Captain Moncrief and his officers!"

"Captain Moncrief! Great God!" and the man sunk back in his chair as though he was shot.

"Yes, brother."

"Impossible!"

"No, Hugh, he is there."

"But I killed him."

"You thought so; but he has just recovered from a severe wound the servants said."

"Well! I am amazed."

"You may well be; but he is there, and his schooner, the brig Mermaid, changed into the schooner-of-war Sea Siren, lies in the Shelter Cove."

"Sis, I must go at once," and the man fairly trembled.

"Hugh, I do not wish you to go, for I know trouble will follow between you and Moncrief, for the neighbors say that he is to marry Sibyl."

He saw that she had misunderstood his startled words, for he had meant go out to sea, not into the inlet, and so he said:

"Well, if you do not wish me to go in and anchor I will not."

"No, Hugh, you must go away, for I hear the Sea Siren sails soon, and when you return up the coast come by night!"

"If the Sea Siren is in the inlet, I will display in the sitting-room window a red light, if she is not then I will leave the window-shutters simply open as usual."

"All right, sis; you are a good girl; but have you seen Sibyl Hurst?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"She was at church to-day."

"Who was with her?"

"Her father, Captain Moncrief, and another officer they spoke of as Surgeon Bennett."

"Ah, yes; but did you speak to her?"

"No."

"That was right."

"She bowed to me, on passing my carriage on her way home."

"Did you return it?"

"Of course not, Hugh, after all you told us about her; but she does not look the one you say she is, while Captain Moncrief has a pleasant face."

"Curse him, and her! they are devils!"

"Oh, Hugh!"

"Was mother with you to-day?"

"When I met Sibyl?"

"Yes."

"No, she had a sick headache and remained at home."

"In fact, Hugh, mother has not seemed well since Sibyl visited the house the other day."

"Did she come there?"

He fairly blazed the question.

"Yes, Hugh."

"When?"

"The morning following the arrival of the Sea Siren in the cove."

"How dare she go to my home?"

"I was away, for I had gone to the village to make some purchases, when she rode up on horseback."

"She saw no one, so dismounted and knocked at the sitting-room door."

"Mother was alone in the room, and was amazed to see Sibyl Hurst enter."

"Sibyl advanced in a pleasant way to greet her, with some remark about being glad to come back, and mother drew herself up, ordered her away from the house and said she was unworthy of the shelter of her roof."

"Mother has spirit, and she did just right."

"But to think that mother and Sibyl should be angry with each other, Hugh?"

"It is that wicked girl's fault."

"But did she reply to mother?"

"Oh, yes, and bitterly, for she said that she would never enter the house again, and she pitied mother and myself as the mother and sister of an outlaw."

The man winced under this shot, while an oath broke from his lips.

"Oh, Hugh! what did Sibyl mean by that, that you were an outlaw?"

"She but said it to hurt mother."

"It is like her, Bess, as I know her."

"Well, brother, I must go, for I wish no trouble between you and Captain Moncrief, and if you lie off here long some one from the schooner or Hurst Haven may see you, and I fear trouble will follow."

"Had you not better remain on board, for it is very rough in the inlet with this sea and wind?"

"Oh, no, I can run in well, and mother would be nearly crazy about me, as I did not tell her where I was going."

"All right, Bess; but be very careful in the run back, for that is a nasty place, that inlet."

"I'll be careful, brother; but don't forget that it will be a red light if the Sea Siren is still in the cove."

"I'll remember it, sis," and leading her on deck again, he aided her into her little skiff and away she went flying over the rough waters, while the schooner got under way once more, and headed along the coast toward Montauk, Hugh Bronx too anxious to escape discovery by the Sea Siren, to watch the running into the inlet of his brave sister.

CHAPTER LII.

IN THE SURF.

OVER the rough waters came the little skiff, with its fair occupant, as Allen Rossmore watched it from the sand dune.

The sea had grown more turbulent since the young girl had run out, and the tide had begun to flow out, which increased the fury of the surf in the inlet.

But Bessie Bronx had a brave heart, and she was skillful in the management of a boat.

Still she could not but feel that she had never been through the inlet when the sea was as wild as then, and the wind blew as hard.

But on she went, heading directly for the gap between the sand dunes, though it was the wildest part of the surf.

"If mother had only seen me on board the schooner, I would have remained there, rather than face this sea," she said to herself.

Then after a while she said, as she drew near the outer breakers:

"I must run in, for the storm will but increase with the night, and no one knows where I am."

"Heaven help me!"

With this fervent prayer upon her lips she nerved herself to the task.

Her boat now rose on the outer breakers, and was sent forward with terrific force, and in bracing herself to hold on more firmly, her foot struck the wooden plug in the bottom of the skiff and forced it from its place.

A cry of horror broke from her lips as a spout of water came up through the drain-hole, and yet, in that mad surf she could not release her tiller to spring forward, grasp and replace the plug.

Like a torrent the water poured in, and like a plaything the boat was in the angry surf.

Still the brave girl did not lose her presence of mind, held her sheet-ropes firmly, and grasped her tiller with a hand that held the skiff on its perilous way.

But the waters pouring in, and breaking over, began to rapidly fill the boat, and then she would not answer her helm as before.

Then the waters surged fore and aft, when the skiff rose or fell on the waves, and the weight, as it went down in the stern buried it beneath a curling breaker, and Bessie was struggling in the midst of the surf.

With her clothes on, and in such a sea, she

would not have lived a minute, and she gave up all hope, when suddenly a man's form appeared near her, a firm hand grasped her arm, and a voice cried cheerily:

"Do not fear, for we can make the land."

She saw a handsome face near her own, a face that was full of courage and confidence; the voice cheered her, the grasp about her was strong, and she gained hope and nerve.

A good swimmer, she aided herself all she could, and after a desperate struggle she felt her feet touch bottom.

"We are safe now," he said.

But the voice had lost its strength, and the brave man having saved her, fairly staggered out of the sea upon the sands, he having exhausted his great strength in his mad battle for her life and his.

Sinking upon the sands he said with a smile:

"I will soon be all right; but it was a hard fight against big odds, miss."

"It was, indeed, and you won the battle nobly, sir."

"Heaven reward you for the life you have saved, for I cannot; I can only remember you in my prayers," and her voice quivered as she spoke.

"I saw you go out, and feared for you, miss, so lay yonder in the sand dunes and watched for your return."

"I saw, too, that you could not manage your boat in such a wild surf, so I came to the shore and just in time to see your skiff go under, so I plunged in to your aid."

"See, yonder is my boat, and I will sail you across to your landing, for I suppose you are Miss Bessie Bronx?"

"Yes, I am Bessie Bronx, and you are?"

"Allen Rossmore, miss, first officer of the American schooner-of-war Sea Siren, that lies in the cove beyond the timber yonder."

"Captain Moncrief is your commander, is he not?"

"Yes, miss."

"Has he not lately received a severe wound?"

"Yes, one that well-nigh cost him his life, Miss Bronx; but shall we go now?" and Rossmore was anxious to change the subject; but, though Bessie started for the boat, she continued:

"Was it not my brother that shot Captain Moncrief by accident?"

"It was no accident," blurted Rossmore, quickly, and then he added, hastily:

"Yes, miss, yes, it was Captain Bronx."

"Did you say that it was not an accident?" and the large eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Pardon me, Miss Bronx, if I decline to talk on this subject," he said, frankly.

"But I urge it, and beg you to tell me."

"I spoke hastily, for I feel strongly upon the subject, Miss Bronx, and I regret to say that no one considered it an accident."

"I seconded Captain Bronx in the duel he fought, for I was then his first officer, and I saw that he was very angry because Captain Moncrief disarmed him and gave him his life."

"Did Captain Moncrief do this?"

"He did."

"Go on, sir."

"He demanded another meeting, with pistols, which Miss Hurst, arriving upon the field, prevented, and, feeling that your brother was in the wrong, I urged him to give it up."

"He was angry with me, spoke severely, ordered me to go on board the schooner under pain of death, and I declining to obey, he fired, not at me, for he is a dead shot, but at Captain Moncrief."

"Pardon my frankness, but you forced me to explain, and I am frank in all I say, though I regret deeply the pain I give."

"And then, sir?" and Bessie was white-faced and stern.

"Then your brother fled to his schooner and set sail."

"Will you answer me a question more, sir?"

"If you demand it."

"I do."

"Well, Miss Bronx?"

"Miss Hurst visited my home some days ago, and, angry at my mother's greeting of her, she said that she pitied the mother and sister of an outlaw."

"What did she mean?"

"Your brother refused to come to, when fired on by a vessel sent in chase, and has been outlawed as a Fugitive Privateersman by the Colonial Government."

"God have mercy upon him!"

"I almost wish that you had allowed me to die in the surf," moaned the poor girl.

Then she asked:

"What do you think of Sibyl Hurst?"

"One of the noblest of women, I think her, Miss Bronx."

"And of her treatment to my brother?"

"She loved him as a brother, not as he wished, and his own rash temper caused all the trouble."

"What do you think of Captain Moncrief?"

"A more noble man never lived."

"Why, he saved your brother from being hanged by a pirate, rescued him from an English vessel on board of which he was a prisoner,

gave him, almost I may say, his vessel as a privateer, and did offer it to him as a gift."

"Offered him the position I now hold, as a regular naval officer, and gave him the papers that allowed him to go as a privateersman, so he could not be his foe, and tried to be his friend; but two men cannot love the same woman, Miss Bronx, and be friends."

"Lieutenant Rossmore, your words surprise me, even as much as they amaze me."

"You saved my life, and you now open my eyes to see that which I did not see before."

"Yours is a frank nature, and I thank you for your frankness."

"Yonder is my home, and I will be glad to have you visit me ere you sail, that my mother may thank you; but I pray you do not say to her what you have to me, even though she should ask you leading questions."

"I thank you again and say good-by; but come to-night and see us."

He held her hand, as she would have drawn it away, and said:

"Miss Bronx, if I pained you, forgive me; but I saved you from death, I risked my life knowing who you were, and I feel that I have a claim upon you."

"What I said of your brother, I said on purpose, that you might know that he was not all that your sisterly love believes him to be."

"In a very short while it must come to your ears, from ruder sources than from my lips, the full story of your brother's career since he left your home as mate of the Mermaid."

"His jealous love for Miss Hurst seemed to make him a different man, and if you will let me tell you all I know of him, it may save you from a little shock, to hear it from others."

There was something in the face and manner of the young officer that seemed to fascinate Bessie, and she said in a low tone:

"Sit there on that arbor bench, and tell me all."

He led her to the seat, and in his frank, kindly way, told all that he knew of Hugh Bronx, from his first jealous madness, after the capture of the Mermaid by Bianca the Buccaneer, to his fitting out the Sea Scorpion at the Government's expense under false colors.

He also told about the money-order, and how Moncrief had hauled off from chasing the Sea Scorpion when he recognized her, that he might not have to obey his orders and hang one who had been Sibyl Hurst's friend, before her eyes.

"Now, Miss Bronx, you know the truth, and from the lips of one who will befriend you, come what may; so command me as such if ever I can serve you."

Bessie was deeply affected, and for a while could not speak.

At last she held forth her hands and said:

"You are very kind, for had this come to me differently, it would have killed me or driven me mad."

"Now I know how to act with my poor brother; but I must prepare my mother for the worst, and I beg you to come to-night."

"I will come," was the answer, and they parted, she going slowly homeward in a dazed kind of way, and he, after watching her along the path until he saw her reach the house, turning and going back to his boat.

Arriving on board the schooner he said, in excuse for his wet clothes, that he had gotten a ducking in the surf.

CHAPTER LIII.

EXEUNT OMNES.

THE position in which Hugh Bronx found himself was not an enviable one.

He was strangely unfortunate in finding British merchantmen, and his men soon began to grumble and show a mutinous spirit once more.

In his distress Hutchins became his adviser.

"Better strike a craft that will pay, cap'n, and never mind the flag."

"You mean capture a craft of any nation?"

"Certainly, sir."

"That is piracy."

"We are not much better now, cap'n, after what you did in Charleston and New York."

"That is too true; but I hoped to have wiped out those stains."

"You can never do it; and something must be done."

"What shall we do?"

"Get money."

"How?"

"Any way."

"Hutchins."

"Sir to you."

"I have a way."

"Yes, sir."

"There is a mansion on the coast that is owned by a very rich man."

"He is said to keep fifty thousand in gold in his cellar, and his silver plate is very valuable."

"Now I'll give you all points, you go in and rob the house, get the silver and we are made."

"I say you, for I must not be seen."

"You are also to get a treasure for me in the shape of the young lady of the house, for she is an heiress, and with her in my possession, you

see, her father will give half his fortune as ransom."

"Then, Hutchins, we can keep the men easy, and I'll make a name for myself that will soon wipe out the charges against me."

"What do you say?"

"Where is this mansion?"

"I will pilot you in to a harbor and direct you to it."

"How many servants?"

"About a dozen on the farm, I guess."

"Where is the gold?"

"In an iron box in the cellar."

"I have seen it, and know it is there."

"And the plate?"

"Is kept on the mahogany shelves in the dining-room."

"I'll do it."

"All right, we will head for the place at once and reach there soon."

But Bessie's going out in her skiff, at the risk of her life, changed the plans of the young outlaw just then.

Putting back along the coast, as the reader knows, he sighted a sail and gave chase.

It proved to be an English merchant ship, and after a long chase he captured her.

She was a store-ship, and a rich haul, so he put a prize crew on board and sent her in to New York as his first peace-offering.

This raised the spirits of the men, but only for a day or two, and then they began to fret again.

So Hugh Bronx headed for the coast near his home.

It was night when he arrived, and he saw no red light in the sitting-room window, and he knew all was safe.

So into the inlet he ran, and Hutchins with twenty picked men went ashore on their marauding and kidnapping expedition.

Impatiently and anxiously Hugh Bronx paced the deck.

Half an hour passed and then he heard shots and shouts up toward the Hurst Haven mansion.

Then came the shots more frequently, loud orders, oaths, and cheers.

But from whence came the cheers he did not know.

He had not long to wait in suspense, though it seemed hours to him, and then was heard running feet, and he saw through the darkness men springing into the boats.

They were soon alongside and a voice cried:

"Cap'n, the Sea Siren lies in this basin somewhere, for her cap'n are up at their house and he kilt officer Hutchins, and some of the boys is dead, sir."

This was enough for Hugh Bronx and he slipped his cable, crowded on sail, and stood for the inlet.

But, as his vessel began to move he knew that the man had told the truth, for he heard voices around the point, and loud orders given to get up the anchor and set sail.

And well he knew that voice, for it was indeed Manton Moncrief's, he having run into the inlet just after dark that evening after a week's cruise, so that Bessie knew not of his presence there and hence did not show the red light in the window.

With the start she had the Sea Scorpion was a league at sea, when the Sea Siren came through the inlet.

But she was in sight of the keen eyes on the cruiser's deck, and a hot chase was at once begun.

At the request of Allen Rossmore, no fire was opened upon the Scorpion until the two vessels were leagues away, far out of hearing of those back on the shore.

Then the Sea Siren began to creep up rapidly upon the Sea Scorpion, the latter opening a hot fire upon her.

But the beautiful cruiser seemed to bear a charmed life, for the shots of the Fugitive Privateer flew wild, while her fire hit hard every time.

It was not long before the Sea Scorpion's men were driven from their guns, and the vessel was carried by boarding.

When Manton Moncrief sprang upon the deck of the schooner, cutlass in hand, his eyes at once fell upon the form of Hugh Bronx, lying dead on his quarter-deck, having been killed by the fire of the Sea Siren.

The Sea Scorpion had been so badly hurt by the fire of the Sea Siren, that he was found to be sinking, and she had to be quickly deserted, going down to her grave in the deep with her commander and his slain crew with her.

"So let her perish," said Moncrief, and then he headed for New York.

Arriving there he held a conversation with the admiral, who had a few days before received the store-ship prize from Hugh Bronx, and was getting in a better humor with him.

"Admiral," said Moncrief, "I am going to ask a favor of you, not for the man, but for his mother and sister."

"I have told you how we took the Sea Scorpion, and that Hugh Bronx went to the bottom of the sea with her, and as he has sent you in that valuable store-ship, and no one knows that he has been outlawed, that you allow it to be

reported that the vessel was sunk in action with an enemy, for I was his enemy, and that her commander went down with her.

"This will not bring dishonor on a noble name, and save great sorrow from the hearts of his mother and sister, and Rossmore here has asked me to make this request of you."

The admiral listened attentively, and said:

"You are a noble fellow, and have been the one to suffer at his hands, so it shall be as you wish."

Thanking the admiral, Moncrief went aboard the Sea Siren, and after sending his prisoners on board the Brimstone, that was in port and needed a crew, he set sail for the inlet near Hurst Haven, for he had been in the mansion when Hutchins tried to kidnap Sibyl, and was anxious to see if she had suffered from the shock, for he had killed the bold marauder while he was leaving the house with Sibyl a captive.

After a rapid run the Sea Siren arrived at the inlet and anchored just after sunset, and while Moncrief went up to Hurst Haven, Allen Rossmore wended his way to the Bronx homestead, for he was anxious to break the news to Bessie and her mother, how he had learned in New York that Hugh, in an action with an enemy, had been killed and his vessel sunk.

It was a sad blow to the mother and daughter, and yet both rejoiced in their hearts that the unfortunate young man had not lived to be brought to a dishonorable end for his unlawful career.

So deep was the sympathy that Allen Rossmore gave to the sorrowing ones that he won the heart of Bessie, already her rescuer from death in the surf, and when, at a subsequent visit, he asked her to some day be his wife, she gladly consented.

And Moncrief had also received welcome at the Hurst Haven mansion, for Sibyl had sighted the Sea Siren running along the coast before sunset and expected him.

The shock had affected her but little, though she little suspected who it was that sought to kidnap her, and supposed, as her father said, they were pirates who sought to rob him, and failing, through the presence of Moncrief, had tried to take her for ransom.

The day after she told the young sailor she had been rejoiced by a visit from Bessie and Mrs. Bronx, who had come to ask her to forgive, forget, and to renew past friendship, for they had been told the truth by Allen Rossmore.

"So I am happy, very happy," she had said that night.

"And will you make me happy, very happy, Sibyl?" asked Manton Moncrief, in a low, eager tone.

"How can I?" she asked, in a voice hardly audible.

"By some day becoming my wife, Sibyl."

And Sibyl answered:

"Yes, for I have loved you, Manton, from the moment that first we met."

Is not my story told, kind reader, in the answer of Sibyl, the Sea Siren?

THE END.

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The Alarum,
April 15, 1861,
The Spirit of '61,
The Precious Heritage,
The Irish Element,
Train's Speech,
Christy's Speech,
Let Me Alone,
Brigand-ier-General,
The Draft,
Union Square Speeches,
The Union,
Our Country's Call,
The Story of an Oak Tree,
Leg On My Leg,

History of Our Flag,
T. F. Meagher's Address,
We Owe to the Union,
Lincoln's Message,
Last Speech of Stephen
A. Douglas,
Great Bell Roland,
The New Year and the
King Cotton, [Union,
Battle Anthem,
The Ends of Peace,
Freedom the Watchword,
Crisis of Our Nation,
Duty of Christian Pa-
triot,
Turkey Dan's Oration,
A Fearless Plea,
The Onus of Slavery,
A Foreigner's Tribute,
The Little Zouave,
Catholic Cathedral,
The "Speculators,"

Dime Comic Speaker, No. 4.

Klebsyergess on the War,
Age Shuntly Considered,
Early Rising,
The Wasp and the Bee,
Comic Grammar, No. 1,
I'm Not a Single Man,
A. Ward's Advice,
Suzfux on Pickwick,
Romeo and Juliet,
Happiness,
Dogs,
Pop,
A Texan Eulogium,
How to be a Fireman,
The United States,
P-Y's Acc't of Himself,
Practical Phrenology,
Beautifn,
Cabbage,
Disagreeable People,
What is a Bachelor Like?
Funny Folks,

A Song of Woe,
Ward's Trip to Richm'd,
Parody,
The Mountebank,
Compound Interest,
A Sermon on the Feet,
Old Dog Jock,
The Fishes' Toilet,
Brian O'Linn,
Crockett to Office-seekers,
Who is My Opponent?
Political Stump Speech,
Comic Grammar, No. 2,
Farewell to the Bottle,
The Cork Leg,
The Smack in School,
Slick's Definition of Wife,
Tale of a Hat,
The Debating Club,
A Dutch Sermon,
Lecture on Locomotion,
Mrs. Taudle on Umbr'la.

Dime Elocutionist, No. 5.

SEC. I. PRINCIPLES OF TRUE ENUNCIATION.—Faults
in Enunciation; How to Avoid Them. Special Rules
and Observations.

SEC. II. THE ART OF ORATORY. Sheridan's List of
the Passions: Tranquillity, Cheerfulness, Mirth,
Rallory, Buffoonery, Joy, Delight, Gravity, In-
quiry, Attention, Modesty, Perplexity, Pity, Grief,
Melancholy, Despair, Fear, Shame, Remorse,
Courage, Boasting, Pride, Obstinacy, Authority,
Commanding, Forbidding, Affirming, Denying,
Difference, Agreeing, Exhorting, Judging, Approv-
ing, Acquitting, Condemning, Teaching, Pardon-
ing, Arguing, Dismissing, Refusing, Granting, De-
pendence, Veneration, Hope, Desire, Love, Re-
spect, Giving, Wonder, Admiration, Gratitude, Cu-
riosity, Persuasion, Tempting, Promising, Affecta-
tion, Sloth, Intoxication, Anger, etc.

SEC. III. THE COMPONENT ELEMENTS OF AN ORA-
TION.—Rules of Composition as applied to Words
and Phrases, viz.: Purity, Propriety, Precision.
As applied to Sentences, viz.: Length of Sentence,
Clearness, Unity, Strength. Figures of Speech; the
Exordium, the Narration, the Proposition, the
Confirmation, the Refutation, the Peroration.

SEC. IV. REPRESENTATIVE EXERCISES IN PROSE AND
VERSE.—Translation: A Plea for the Ox; Falstaff's
Soliloquy on Honor; the Burial of Lincoln; the
Call and Response; the Bayonet Charge; History
of a Life; the Bugle; the Bells; Byron; Macbeth
and the Dagger; Hamlet's Soliloquy; Old Things;
Look Upward; King William Rufus; the Eye; an
Essa Onto Musik; Discoveries of Galileo.

SEC. V. OBSERVATIONS OF GOOD AUTHORITIES.

Dime Humorous Speaker, No. 6.

A Sad Story,
A String of Onions,
A Tragic Story,
Cats,
Courtship,
Debt,
Devils,
Dow, Jr.'s Lectures,
Ego and Echo,
Fashionable Women,
Fern Thistles,
Good-Nature,
Gottlieb Klebsyergoss,
Schlackenlichter's snake,
Hosea Biglow's Opinions,
How the Money Goes,
Huz-ki-do-ri's Fourth of
July Oration,
If you Mean No, Say No,
Jo Bows on Leap Year,
Lay of the Henpecked,
Lot Skinner's Elegy,
Matrimony,
Nothing to Do,
Old Caudle's Umbrella,
Old Grimes's Son,
Paddle Your Own Canoe,
Parody on "Araby's
Daughter,"

Poetry Run Mad,
Right Names,
Scientific Lectures,
The Ager,
The Cockney,
The Codfish,
Fate of Sergeant Thin,
The Features' Quarrel,
Hamerician Woodchuck,
The Harp of a Thousand
Strings,
The Last of the Sarpints,
The March to Moscow,
The Mysterious Guest,
The Pumper,
The Sea-Serpent,
The Secret,
The Shoemaker,
The Useful Doctor,
The Waterfall,
To the Bachelors' Union
League,
United States Presidents,
Vagaries of Popping the
Question,
What I Wouldn't Be,
Yankee Doodle Aladdin,
Ze Moskeetare,
1933.

Dime Standard Speaker, No. 7.

The World We Live In,
Woman's Claims,
Authors of our Liberty,
The Real Conqueror,
The Citizen's Heritage,
Italy,
The Mechanic,
Nature and Nature's God,
The Modern Good, [Sun,
Ossian's Address to the
Independence Bell—1777,
The Neck,
Foggy Thoughts,
The Ladies' Man,
Life,
The Idler,
The Unbeliever,
The Two Lives,
The True Scholar,
Judges not Infallible,
Fanaticism,
Instability of Successful
Agriculture, [Crime,
Ireland,
The People Always Con-
Music of Labor, [quer,
Prussia and Austria,
Wishing,

John Burns, Gettysburg,
No Sect in Heaven,
Miss Prude's Tea-Party,
The Power of an Idea,
The Beneficence of the
Suffrage, [Sea,
Dream of the Revelers,
How Cyrus Laid the Cable,
The Prettiest Hand,
Paradoxical,
Little Jerry, the Miller,
The Blarney Stone,
The Student of Bonn,
The Broken Household,
The Bible,
The Purse and the Sword,
My Country,
True Moral Courage,
What is War?
Butter,
My Deborah Lee,
The Race,
The Pin and Needle,
The Modern Paritan,
Immortality of the Soul,
Occupation,
Heroism and Daring,
A Shot at the Deceanter.

Dime Stump Speaker, No. 8.

Hon. J. M. Stubbs' Views
on the Situation,
Hans Schwackheimer on
Woman's Suffrage,
All for a Nomination,
Old Ocean, [Sea,
The Sea, the Sea, the open
Star Bangled Spanner,
Stay Where You Belong,
Life's What You Make It,
Where's My Money,
Speech from Conscience,
Man's Relation to Society

The Limits to Happiness,
Good-nature a Blessing,
Sermon from Hard-shell
Tail-enders, [Baptist,
The Value of Money,
Meteoritic Disquisition,
Be Sure You are Right,
Be of Good Cheer,
Crabbed Folks, [Shrew,
Taming a Masculine
Farmer, [Our Country,
The True Greatness of
The Cold-water Man,

Permanency of States,
Liberty of Speech,
New England and Union,
The Unseen Battlefield,
Plea for the Republic,
America, [Fallacy,
"Night of Secession" a
Life's Sunset,
Human Nature,
Lawyers,
Wrongs of the Indians,
Appeal in behalf of Am.
Miseries of War, [Liberty,
A Lay Sermon,
A Dream,

Astropomical,
The Moon, [pend
Duties of American Citi-
The Man,
Temptations of Cities,
Broken Resolutions,
There is no Death,
Races,
A Fruitful Discourse,
A Frenchman's Dinner,
Unjust National Acqui'n
The Amateur Coachman
John Thompson's Dau's
House Cleaning,
It Is Not Your Business.

Dime Juvenile Speaker, No. 9.

A Boy's Philosophy,
Hoe Out Your Row,
Six-Year-Old's Protest,
The Suicidal Cat,
A Valediction,
Popping Corn,
The Editor,
The Same, in rhyme,
The Fairy Shoemaker,
What Was Learned,
Press On,
The Horse,
The Snake in the Grass,
Tale of the Tropics,
Bromley's Speech,
The Same, second extract
The Fisher's Child,
Shakespearean Scholar,
A Maiden's Psalm of Life,
A Mixture,
Plea for Skates,
Playing Ball,
Ah, Why,
Live for Something,
Lay of the Hen-Pecked,
The Outside Dog,
Wolf and Lamb,
Lion in Love,
Frogs Asking for a King,
Sick Lion,
Country and Town Lane,
Man and Woman,
Home,
The Lotus-Planter,
Little Things,
A Baby's Soliloquy,
Repentance,
A Plea for Eggs,
Humbug Patriotism,
Night After Christmas,
Short Legs,
Shrimps on Amusements,

How the Raven Became
Black,
A Mother's Work,
The Same,
Who Rules,
A Sheep Story,
A Little Correspondent,
One Good Turn Deserves
My Dream, [Another,
Rain,
I'll Never Use Tobacco,
A Mosaic,
The Old Bachelor,
Prayer to Light,
Little Jim,
Angelina's Lament,
Johnny Shrimps on Boot
Mercy,
Choice of Hours,
Poor Richard's Sayings,
Who Killed Tom Roper,
Nothing to Do,
Honesty Best Policy,
Heaven,
Ho for the Fields,
Fashion on the Brain,
On Shanghaies,
A Smile,
Casablanca,
Homoeopathic Soup,
Nose and Eyes,
Malt, [Come
A Hundred Years of
The Madman and his
Little Sermons, [Razor
Snuffles on Electricity,
The Two Cradles,
The Ocean Storm,
Do Thy Little—Do It Well
Little Fuss,
Base Ball, [Fever
Prescription for Eprin

Dime Spread-Eagle Speaker, No. 10.

Ben Buster's Oration,
Hans Von Spiegel's 4th,
Josh Billings's Advice,
A Hard-shell Sermon,
The Boots,
The Squeezer,
Noah and the Devil,
A Lover's Luck,
Hifalutin Adolphus,
Digestion and Paradise,
Distinction's Disadvant-
Smith, [ages,
Gushakna Bendibus,
A Stock of Notions,
Speaking for the Sheriff,
Daking a Sweat,
Then and Now,
Josh Billings's Lectur'ng,
Doctor De Blister's Ann't,
Consignments,
Hard Lives,
Dan Bryant's Speech,
A Colored View,
Original Maud Muller,
Nobody,
Train of Circumstances,
Good Advice,
The Itching Palm,

Drum-head Sermons,
Schnitzer's Philosophed
"Woman's Rights,"
Luke Lather,
The Hog,
Jack Spratt,
New England Tragedy,
The Ancient Bachelor,
Jacob Whittle's Speech,
Jerks Prognosticates,
A Word with Snooks,
Sut Lovengood,
A Mule Ride,
Josh Billings on Buzzers
Il Trovatore,
Kissing in the Street-
Scandalous,
Slightly Mixed,
The Office-seeker,
Old Bachelors,
Woman,
The Niam Niam,
People Will Talk,
Swackhamer's Ball,
Who Wouldn't be Fire-
Don't Depend on Daddan
Music of Labor,
The American Ensign.

Debater and Chairman's Guide No. 11.

I.—DEBATING SOCIETY.
Its Office and Usefulness,
Formation of,
Constitution of,
By-Laws of,
Rules of Government,
Local Rules of Order,
Local Rules of Debate's,
Subjects of Discussion.
II.—HOW TO DEBATE.
Why there are few good
Debaters,
Prerequisites to Oratori-
cal Success,
The Logic of Debate,
The Rhetoric of Debate,
Maxims to Observe,
The Preliminary Premise,
Order of Argument,
Summary.

III.—CHAIRMAN'S GUIDE.
Ordinary Meetings and
Assemblies,
The Organization,
Order of Business and
Proceedings,
The "Question." How it
can be Treated,
The "Question." How it
be Considered,
Rights to the Floor,
Rights of a Speaker as
Against the Chair,
Calling Yeas and Nays,
Interrupting a Vote,
Organization of Delibera-
tive Bodies, Conven-
tions, Annual or Gen-
eral Assemblies,
Preliminary Organization

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862 Riata Rob, the Range Champion.
855 The Cowboy Chief's Sure-Shot.
848 The Rival Red-Hat Sports.
837 Carly Kid, the Cheyenne Sport.
824 The Soft Hand Detective.
813 The Soft Hand's Clutch.
809 Dan Dunn, the Soft-Hand Sport.
796 The Frisco Detective's Thug-Tangle.
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780 The Dead Sport's Double.
771 Prince John, Detective Special.
763 Dandy Don, the Denver Detective.
754 The Man from Texas; or, Dangerfield, the Doctor Detective.
744 Sweepstakes Sam, the Silver Sport.
730 The Secret Six; or, Old Halcyon.
712 The Man of Silk.
705 Bantam Bob, the Beauty from Butte.
698 Kent Kasson, the Preacher Sport.
683 Bob Breeze, the Rounder Detective.
675 Steel Surry, the Sport from Sunrise.
668 Solemn Saul's Luck Streak.
661 The Get-There Sharp.
651 Silvestip Steve, the Sky Scrapper from Siskiyou.
645 Gopher Gabe, the Unseen Detective.
636 Dandy Darling, Detective.
627 Mossback Mose, the Mountaineer.
617 The Grip Sack Sharp's Even up.
597 Big Bandy, the Brigadier of Brimstone Butte.
588 Sandy Sands, the Sharp from Snap City.
576 Silver-Tongued Sid; or, Grip Sack Sharp's Sweep.
564 The Grip-Sack Sharp; or, The Seraphs of Sodom.
558 Grip-Sack Sid, the Sample Sport.
547 The Buried Detective; or, Saul's Six Sensations.
541 Major Magnet, the Man of Nerve.
535 Dandy Dutch, the Decorator from Dead-Lift.
527 Dandy Andy, the Diamond Detective.
514 Gabe Gunn, the Grizzly from Ginseng.
504 Solemn Saul, the Sad Man from San Saba.
495 Rattlepate Rob; or, The Roundhead's Reprisal.
488 The Thoroughbred Sport.
474 Daddy Dead-Eye, the Despot of Dew Drop.
466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.
458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
438 Oklahoma Nick.
433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Secret Service Spy.
416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
403 The Nameless Sport.
395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Man 'Way Back.
249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
241 Softie Saul, King of the Rustlers.
233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.

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- 810 Fire-Eye, the Thug's Terror.
795 Old Night-Hawk, the Crook Shadower.
768 The Prince of New York Crooks.
756 Old Burke, the Madison Square Detective.
747 Double-voice Dan's Double Disguise.
715 Double-Voice Dan on Deck.
702 Double-Voice Dan, the Always-on-Deck Detective.
596 Double-Voice Dan, the Go-it Alone Detective.
689 The Sparkler Sharp.
676 Hurricane Hal, the Cowboy Hotspur.
669 Old True Blue, the Trusty.
663 The Giant Sport; or, Sold to Satan.
656 Old Ping Ugly, the Rough and Ready.
648 Gold Glove Gid, the Man of Grit.
641 Aztec Jack, the Desert Nomad.
631 Colonel Cool, the Santa Fe Sharp.
602 Captain Nameless, the Mountain Mystery.
571 Old Dismal, the Range Detective.
545 Hustler Harry, the Cowboy Sport.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

- 910 The Arizona Detective.
894 Silver Sam, the Shasta Sport.
880 The Silver Sport's Double.
868 The Race-Course Detective.
856 The Hayseed Detective.
772 Captain Corden, the Twister Detective.
755 Wild Pete the Broncho-Buster Detective.
726 Fearless Sam, the Grand Combination Detective.
719 Boston Bob, the Sport Detective.
572 Jaunt Joe, the Jockey Detective.
554 Mad Sharp, the Rustler.
539 Rube Rocket, the Tent Detective.
526 Death-Grip, the Tenderfoot Detective.
507 The Drummer Detective.
482 The Giant Horseman.
398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective.

BY WILLIAM R. EYSTER.

- 916 Two Dead-Square Sports.
902 Soft Velvet, the Man from Sandrock.
891 Genteel Jim, Sport-at-Large.
881 The Clubman-Crook's Cat's-paw.
887 The Frisco Sport.
832 The Stranger Sport's Shake-up.
828 Kirk King, the Man from Kirby.
818 Gentleman Dave, the Dead Game Sport.
783 The King-Pin Tramp.
767 The Sport of Silver Bend.
718 Uncle Bedrock's Big Bounce.
707 The Rival Rovers.
687 Double Cinch Dan, the Sport With a Charm.
677 Mr. Jackson, the Gent from Jaybird.
659 Gilt-Edge Johnny; or, Roldan and His Rovers.
650 Lucky Lester's Lone Hand.
634 Old Handcart's big Dump.
622 The All Around Sports.
603 Deser' Alf, the Man With the Cougar.
590 Gentle Jack, the High Roller from Humbug.
578 Seven Shot Steve, the Sport with a Smile.
568 The Dude Detective.
558 Hurrah Harry, the High Horse from Halcyon.
549 Belshazzar Brick, the Bailiff of Blue Blazes.
533 Oregon, the Sport With a Scar.
508 The Dude from Denver.
478 Pinnacle Pete; or, The Fool from Way Back.
459 Major Sunshine, the Man of Three Lives.
429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.
402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
396 The Piper Detective; or, The Gilt Edge Gang.
375 Royal George, the Three in One.
356 Thr-e Handsome Sports; or, The Combination.
333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
229 Captain Cutsie-ee; or, The Little Sport.
214 The Two Cool Sports; or, Gertie of the Gulch.
182 Hands Up; or, The Knights of the Canyon.
160 Soft Hand, Sharp; or, The Man with the Sand.
145 Pistol Pards; or, The Silent Sport from Cinnabar.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

- 657 Long Tom, the Privateer.
633 The Sea Spy.
621 The Red Privateer; or, The Midshipman Rover.
584 Fire Feather, the Buccaneer King.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail.
361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
123 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 838 Old Grips Still Hunt.
827 Detective Walden's Web.
778 The Butler Detective; or, Old Grip's Grip.
770 The Showman Detective.
762 Old Grip, the Detective.
740 Captain Clew, the Fighting Detective.
732 The Hurricane Detective.
643 Castlemaine, the Silent Sifter.
616 Magnus, the Weird Detective.
606 The Drop Detective.
595 Wellborn, the Upper Crust Detective.
582 Joram, the Detective Expert.
574 Old Falcon's Double.
501 The Thug King; or, The Falcon Detective's Foe.
548 Falconbridge, the Sphinx Detective.
536 Old Falcon's Foe; or, The Detective's Swell Job.
515 Short-Stop Maje, the Diamond Field Detective.
509 Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective.
501 Springsteel Steve, the Retired Detective.
494 The Detective's Spy.
485 Rowlock, the Harbor Detective.
477 Dead-arm Brandt.
467 Mainwaring, the Salamander.
462 The Circus Detective.
451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
388 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.

- 752 The Suspect Sport of Daisy Drift.
626 Ducats Dion, the Nabob Sport Detective.
612 Sheriff Stillwood, the Regulator of Raspberry.
598 The Dominie Detective.
591 Duke Daniels, the Society Detective.
580 Shadowing a Shadow.
565 Prince Paul, the Postman Detective.
557 The Mountain Graybeards; or, Riddles' Riddle.
519 Old Riddles, the Rocky Ranger.
499 Twilight Charlie, the Road Sport.
472 Gilbert of Gotham, the Steel-arm Detective.
452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.
436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 483 Flush Fred, the River Sharp.
368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.
348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

- 267 The White Squaw.
234 The Hunter's Feast.
213 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter.
200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Lake Queen.
66 The Specter Barque. A Tale of the Pacific.
55 The Scalp Hunters. Romance of the Plains.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 911 The Blue Blockader; or, The Coast Grayhound.
906 The Cuban Cruiser.
854 The Ocean Gipsy.
834 The Wild Steer Riders; or, Texas Jack's Terror.
819 The Rival Monte Cristos.
805 The Last of the Pirates; or, Dorn Driven.
801 The Water Wolves' Detective; or, Trapping the Grave Ghouls.
791 The Coast-Raider's Death-Chase.
748 Arizona Charlie, the Crack-shot Detective.
704 Invisibile Ivan, the Wizard Detective.
685 The Red-skin Sea Rover.
679 Ravello, the Pirate Cruiser; or, The Rival Rovers.
672 The Red Rapiet; or, The Sea Rover's Bride.
662 The Jew Detective; or, The Beautiful Convict.
640 The Rover's Retribution.
635 The Ex-Buccaner; or, The Stigma of Sin.
625 Red Wings; or, The Gold Seekers of the Bahamas.
615 The Three Buccaneers.
610 The Red Flag Rover; or, White Wings of the Deep.
605 The Shadow Silver Ship.
600 The Silver Ship; or, The Sea Scouts of '76.
598 The Sea Rebel; or, Red Rovers of the Revolution.
587 Conrad, the Sailor Spy; or, True Hearts of '76.
581 The Outlawed Skipper; or, The Gantlet Runner.
569 The Man from Mexico.
553 Max Monte, the Mutineer; or, The Branded Brig.
546 The Doomed Whaler; or, The Life Wreck.
530 The Savages of the Sea.
524 The Sea Chaser; or, The Pirate Noble.
510 El Moro, the Corsair Commodore.
493 The Scouts of the Sea.
457 The Sea Insurgent; or, The Conspirator Son.
446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
420 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
399 The New Monte Cristo.
393 The Convict Captain.
377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
341 The Sea Desperado.
336 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
325 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermits.
318 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
307 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
355 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
198 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
184 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 802 Dan Dirk, King of No Man's Land.
583 Captain Adair, the Cattle King.
567 Captain Midnight, the Man of Craft.
544 The Back to Back Pards.
522 The Champion Three.
502 Bareback Buck, the Centaur of the Plains.
472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To."
431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.
404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
333 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
299 Three of a Kind; or, Dick, Despard and the Sport.
251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
114 The Gentleman from Pike.
80 A Man of Nerve; or, Calban the Dwarf.
54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hill's Sport.
29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.

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- 323 Hotspur Hugh; or, The Banded Brothers.
311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
305 Silver-Plated Sol, the Montana Rover.
291 Horseshoe Hank, the Man of Big Luck.
285 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
278 Texa Chick, the Southwest Detective.
271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Missik.
202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
194 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.

BY OLL COOMES.

- 619 Kit Bandy & Co, the Border Detective.
148 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.
99 The Giant Rifleman; or, Wild Camp Life.
43 Dakota Dan, the Reckless Ranger.

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960 Buffalo Bill's Blue Belt Brigade.
956 Buffalo Bill's Volunteer Vigilantes.
950 Buffalo Bill at Bay.
943 Buffalo Bill's Block Game.
936 Buffalo Bill's Black Pard.
927 Buffalo Bill's Bluff; or, Dusky Dick the Sport.
921 Buffalo Bill's Quandary; or, Velvet Bill's Vow.
915 Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon-Scout.
909 Buffalo Bill's League; or, Red Butterfly.
904 Buffalo Bill's Tangled Trail.
900 Buffalo Bill's Rough Riders.
895 Buffalo Bill's Secret Ally.
890 Buffalo Bill's Life-Stake.
882 The Three Bills: Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and Band-box Bill; or, The Bravo in Broadcloth.
874 Buffalo Bill's Backskin Braves.
869 Buffalo Bill's Road-Agent Round-up.
863 Buffalo Bill's Death Charm.
857 Buffalo Bill's Royal Flush.
851 Buffalo Bill's Double Dilemma.
845 Buffalo Bill's Redskin Ruse.
839 Buffalo Bill's Boys in Blue.
836 Buffalo Bill's Sharp Shooters.
822 Buffalo Bill's Best Bower.
816 Buffalo Bill's Red Trail.
812 Buffalo Bill's Death-Knell.
794 Buffalo Bill's Winning Hand.
787 Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot.
781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
777 Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower.
769 Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake.
765 Buffalo Bill's Dozen; or, Silk Ribbon Sam.
761 Buffalo Bill's Mascot.
757 Buffalo Bill's Double.
750 Buffalo Bill's Big Four; or, Custer's Shadow.
743 Buffalo Bill's Flush Hand.
739 Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, The Masked Driver.
735 Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.
731 Buffalo Bill's Beagles; or, Silk Lasso Sam.
727 Buffalo Bill's Body Guard.
722 Buffalo Bill on the War-path.
716 Buffalo Bill's Scout Shadowers.
710 Buffalo Bill Baffled; or, The Deserter Desperado.
697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail; or, Mustang Madge.
687 Buffalo Bill's Swoop; or, The King of the Mines.
658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
653 Lasso King's League; or, Buck Taylor in Texas.
649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
644 Buffalo Bill's Bonanza; or, Silver Circle Knights.
632 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
629 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
159 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

By Buffalo Bill.

- 973 The Dread Shot Four.
969 Texas Jack, the Lasso King.
839 The Ranch King Dead-Shot.
820 White Beaver's Still Hunt.
807 Wild Bill, the Wild West Duelist.
800 Wild Bill, the Dead-Center Shot.
639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pard of the Plains.
414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
53 Death-Trail; or, The Chief of Scouts.

By Leon Lewis, Ned Buntline, etc.

- 773 Buffalo Bill's Ban; or, Cody to the Rescue.
632 Buffalo Bill's Secret Service Trail.
629 Buffalo Bill's Daring Role; or, Daredevil Dick.
517 Buffalo Bill's First Trail; or, The Express Rider.
155 Buffalo Bill, Chief of Scouts.
117 Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Dashing Dandy.
92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

- 833 The Man from Mexico in New York.
872 The King-Pin Shark; or, Thad Burr's Ten Strike.
861 The Tenderloin Big Four.
353 The Quaker City Crook.
844 Tracked to Chicago.
836 The Policy Broker's Blind.
829 The Frisco Sharper's Cool Hand.
821 The Tramp Shadower's Backer.
813 The Sham Spotter's Shrewd Scheme.
806 The Grand Street Gold-Dust Sharpers.
798 Detective Burr's Lunatic Witness.
792 The Wall Street Sharper's Snap.
784 Thad Burr's Death Drop.
742 Detective Burr Among the New York Thugs.
734 Detective Burr's Foil; or, A Woman's Strategy.
728 Detective Burr, the Headquarters Special.
713 Detective Burr's Spirit Chase.
706 Detective Burr's Seven Clues.
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- 87 Shadrach, the Sport Detective.
822 Gilbert Goldspur, the Dandy Sport.
905 Shasta Sam, the Sparkler.
877 Cool Creede, the Dead-Shot.
799 The Sport from St. Louis.
518 Royal Richard, the Thoroughbred.

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- 929 Gentleman George, the Showman Sport.
912 Gentle Joe's Lone Hand.
903 The Train Detective.
896 Kent Keen, the Crook-Crusher.
888 Nightshade in New York.
879 Falcon Flynn, the Flash Detective.
871 The Crook Cashier.
859 Clew-Hawk Keene's Right Bower.
847 Hiram Hawk, the Harlem Detective.
840 Major Bullion, Boss of the Tigers.
831 Shadowing the London Detective.
817 Plush Velvet, the Prince of Spotters.
803 The Bogus Broker's Right Bower.
788 The Night-Hawk Detective.
779 Silk Ribbon's Crush-out.
766 Detective Zach, the Broadway Spotter.
751 The Dark Lantern Detective.
736 The Never-Fail Detective.
724 Captain Hercules, the Strong Arm Detective.
711 Dan Damon, the Gift-Edge Detective.
701 Silver Steve, the Branded Sport.
694 Gideon Grip, the Secret Shadower.
684 Velvet Van, the Mystery Shadower.
678 The Dude Desperado.
671 Jason Clew, the Silk-Handed Ferret.
664 Monk Morel, the Man-Hunter.
654 Sol Sphinx, the Ferret Detective.
642 Red Pard and Yellow.
608 Silent Sam, the Shadow Sphinx.
592 Captain Sid, the Shasta Ferret.
579 Old Cormorant, the Bowery Shadow.
569 Captain Cobra, the Hooded Mystery.
559 Danton, the Shadow Sharp.
550 Silk Hand, the Mohave Ferret.
543 The Magnate Detective.
532 Jack Javert, the Independent Detective.
523 Reynard of Red Jack; or, The Lost Detective.
512 Captain Velvet's Big Stake.
505 Phil Fox, the Gentle Spotter.
496 Richard Redfire, the Two Worlds' Detective.
487 Sunshine Sam, a Chip of the Old Block.
480 Hawkspare, the Man with a Secret.
468 Coldgrip in Deadwood.
460 Captain Coldgrip, the Detective.
453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
441 The California Sharp.
434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
352 The Desperate Dozen.
347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
941 The Shadow Sport from Frisco.

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- 948 The Red-Gloved Detective.
931 Frisco Frank at Glory Gulch.
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905 The Doomsday-Den Detective.
899 The Double-Quick Detective.
893 Yellow Gid, of Dark Divide.
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841 Graydon's Double Deal.
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823 The Athlete Sport About Town.
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790 Plunger Pete, the Race Track Detective.
782 Royal Rock, the Round-up Detective.
774 Steve Starr, the Dock Detective.
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703 Spokane Saul, the Samaritan Suspect.
692 Dead-Shot Paul, the Deep-Range Explorer.
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638 Murdock, the Dread Detective.
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611 Alkali Abe, the Game Chicken from Texas.
596 Rustler Rube; the Round-Up Detective.
586 Dan Dixon's Double.
570 Steady Hand, the Napoleon of Detectives.
563 Wyoming Zeke, the Hotspur of Hony-suckie.
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521 Paradise Sam, the Nor'-West Pilot.
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498 Central Pacific Paul, the Mail Train Spy.
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486 Kansas Kitten, the Northwest Detective.
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463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.
455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
437 Deep Duke; or, The Man of Two Lives.
427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
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361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.
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876 Gold Button Sport; or, The Miner Sharps.
842 Teton Tom, the Half-Blood.
835 The King-Pin Detective.
814 The New Yorker Among Texas Sports.
775 King Dandy, the Silver Sport.
753 Gideon's Grip at Babylon Par.
717 Captain Pat McGowen, the Greencoat Detective.
674 Uncle Sun Up, the Born Detective.
670 The Lightweight Detective.
665 The Frisco Detective; or, The Golden Gate Find.
613 Keen Billy, the Sport.
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594 Fire Face, the Silver King's Foe.
588 The Silver Sharp Detective.
577 Tom, of California; or, Detective's Shadow Act.
570 The Actress Detective; or, The Invisible Hand.
562 Lone Hand, the Shadow.
520 The Lone Hand on the Caddo.
490 The Lone Hand in Texas.
475 Chin Chin, the Chinese Detective.
465 The Actor Detective.
440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
363 Crowningshield, the Detective.
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252 The Wall Street Hood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
196 La Marmoset, the Lethetic Queen.
101 The Man from New York.
91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor Prison and Street.
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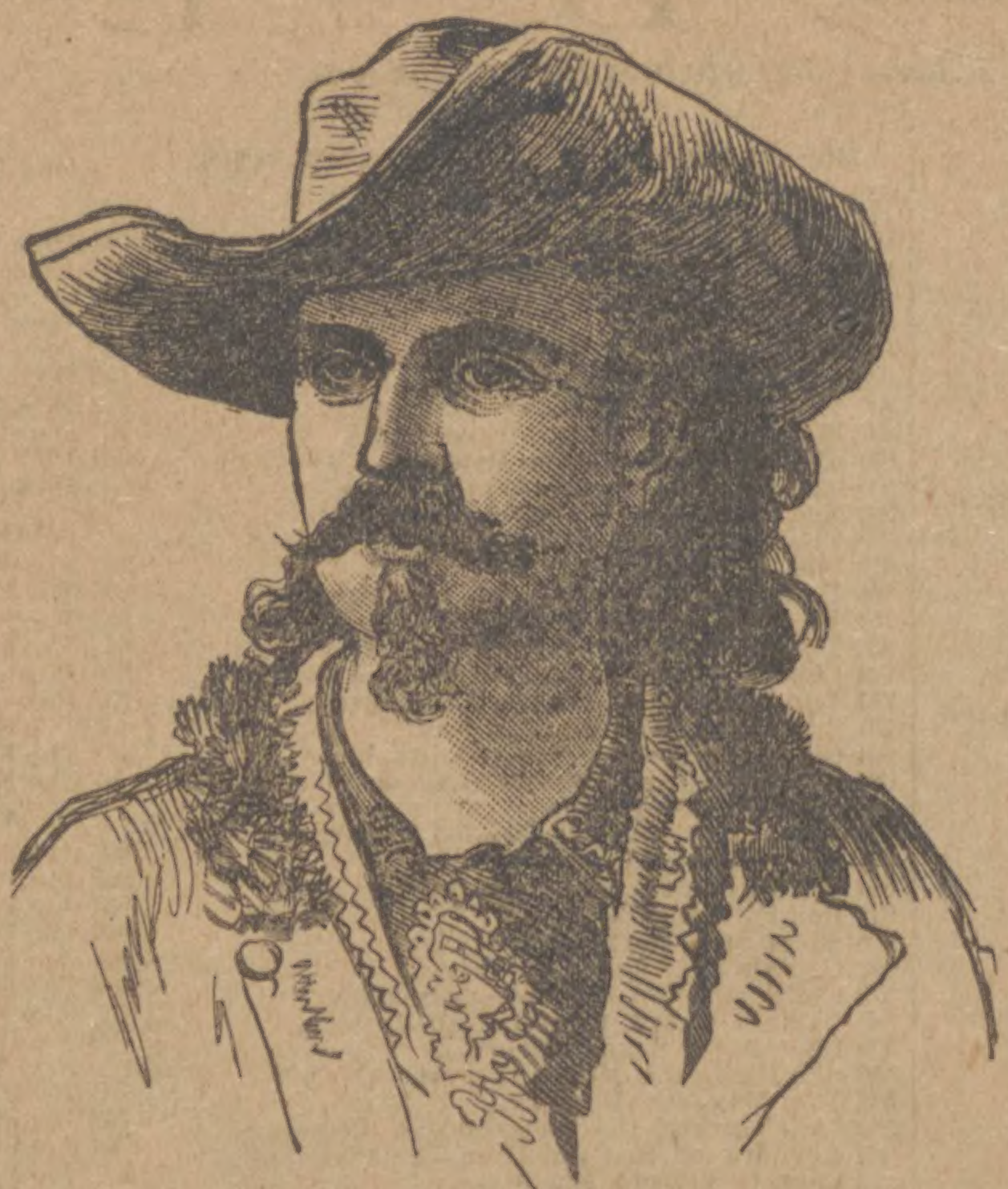
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